Identity in Vietnamese Diasporic Cinema

Irene Soldavini

PhD

School of Oriental and African Studies

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

French and American cinema has portrayed Viet Nam and the Vietnamese in narratives which, broadly-speaking, are reflective of French and American ideologies. The Vietnamese, in these productions, have generally been presented as the object, and not as the subject. However, since the 1980s, an interesting and significant cinematic counter-narrative to the Western idea of Viet Nam has been constructed. This is because the Vietnamese diaspora in France and in the United States has started making films about its own experiences of French colonial rule, the Vietnamese-American conflict, the Vietnamese Communist regime, exilic journeys, contemporary Viet Nam, and the generational conflicts among the Vietnamese diaspora. The identities of the diasporic Vietnamese- particularly the younger generations- have, inevitably, been strongly shaped by these themes, but, at the same time, are also clearly influenced by the culture and values of the new country. The thesis demonstrates how diasporic Vietnamese film makers construct narratives which clearly express hybridized identity: their output presents both aspects of a traditional Western discourse and, significantly, elements not seen in American and French productions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor Dr Dana Healy for her guidance. Moreover, without her practical assistance, I would also have been unable to locate some vital sources for this work. I would also like to express my gratitude to Maria D'Ambrosca, David Hill and Professor Giacomo Beltramini.

Contents

I

Overview

In the past twenty years or so, individuals of Vietnamese ancestry residing in France and the United States have started to make films about Viet Nam and the Vietnamese diaspora. Until quite recently, these received very little attention from either film critics or, especially, academics in the English-speaking world. Even now, they are very much a minority interest. The first production to attract *some* media attention was *The Scent of Green Papaya*, following its critical success at Cannes in 1993. However, critics such as Ebert classified this and other French-Vietnamese films as 'art-house', and, outside of France, they found no more than the limited audience that such a designation (with the inevitable subtitles) usually entails. What has - to some degree- popularised the genre is the participation of famous Hollywood actors in more recent American-Vietnamese productions allied to the existence of a larger American diaspora.

My first encounter with diasporic Vietnamese film was, perhaps unsurprisingly, *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993). At that point, I was unable to find more than one academic article written about that film, and more generally, very little academic research on Vietnamese diasporic cinema. More recently, academics - perhaps stimulated by the higher profile of US-based productions - have started to take more of an interest in Vietnamese diasporic cinema. However, somewhat ironically, the academic discussions and articles are mostly focused on French-Vietnamese cinema. The European art-house and post-colonial aura surrounding these films seems to attract more academic interest than the rather less "arty", war and drama focused American-Vietnamese productions.

The main reason for choosing to research in Vietnamese diasporic cinema is, firstly, this lack of an academic counterpoint to the 'traditional'- and in some respects clichéed-discourse proposed by Hollywood and European cinema towards Viet Nam. Secondly, I have also been very impressed by the overall quality- particularly the authorial style and strength of screenplay- of most of these diasporic Vietnamese films, a quality that, to my mind deserves a more thorough investigation than has hitherto been the case. I have distilled my interest into a set of research questions focused on the broad issue of identity and its expression in Vietnamese diasporic film. Specifically, the following questions are addressed to Vietnam-focused works produced by filmmakers from the two largest (and, to date, only film-producing) Vietnamese diasporic communities: those in France and the United States:

1) How does the Vietnamese diaspora portray Viet Nam, the Vietnamese and themselves in their movies? These questions can themselves be sub-divided into the following issues:
    - Why is food so represented in these films? For which purpose?
    - What is the role of the family in Vietnamese diasporic movies?
    - Is Confucian culture represented in Vietnamese diasporic movies? How are Confucian values portrayed by diasporic Vietnamese film directors?
    - In which manner do Vietnamese diasporic movies portray women?
2) What are the main differences - if any- between American-Vietnamese and French-Vietnamese films?
3) Are Vietnamese diasporic films post-colonial/ post-war films?

While this thesis can no doubt still be seen as a product of a Eurocentric discourse (as is Postcolonial Studies more generally) and cannot claim to be inclusive of all the aspects linked with the diasporic Vietnamese filmic experience, it aims to offer an in-depth elucidation of

identity in the works of these filmmakers: how Vietnameseness is both expressed and reshaped by the diasporic experience.

II

Introduction

In Western fiction filmic productions and narratives, Viet Nam and the Vietnamese have hitherto been represented in a very particular way. The Vietnamese have generally been portrayed in an Orientalised way as either exotic and seductive or effeminate, with the country itself usually being characterized as a dangerous and dark jungle. The overall aim of this thesis is to analyze the techniques and manner by which French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American film directors[1] with their Vietnamese-Western hybrid identities have transformed and re-imagined the Vietnamese, Viet Nam and its diaspora in their diasporic film productions. The first of these productions, *Poussiere d'Empire*, by director Lam Le was produced in 1983. The 1990s and early 21st century have seen a steady increase in the number of Vietnamese diasporic film productions. Not all of these productions are accessible but, fortunately, a sufficient number are. The thesis will analyze the available fictional feature films made by the French and American Vietnamese diaspora between 1980 and 2006. While the diaspora stretches beyond these two countries- China and Australia and Thailand also have sizeable diasporic populations- cinematic productions to date (in contrast to literature) have come from those elements of the diaspora which have settled in France and the United States.

[1] The Vietnamese film directors analyzed in this paper are also the screenwriters of their films. Therefore they have control over the film narrative and structure.

Cinema and the Myths of Viet Nam

French contemporary cinema[2], as argued by Norindr (1996), instead of problematizing the French imperialist narrative, has contributed to nostalgically recreating the myths and legitimacy narratives which have justified the French colonial presence in Viet Nam. This has been achieved by creating a phantasmagoric Viet Nam. The colonial phantasmatic has been defined as "the ideological reality through which colonial fantasies...emerged, operated and manifested themselves" (Norindr: 1996: 16). The protagonists of such films are therefore not Viet Nam or the Vietnamese, but, rather, the French. The French, in constructing their experiences of Indochina, have treated the Vietnamese as marginal to the narrative. American cinema also created narratives and myths on Viet Nam. These differ, however, from the phantasmatic memories of Indochina created by the French. American did not colonize Viet Nam and the sole experience the Americans have of this South East Asian land relates to the Vietnamese-American conflict. American film directors made films revolving around the Vietnamese-American conflict were interested in American soldiers' experience in the jungle, and also in the American reactions toward conscription, protest, veteran reintegration, and rebirth (Devine: 1999: xiv). In both the American and French case, however, the Vietnamese have been far removed from the centre of the narrative.

French and American Films on Viet Nam: Viet Nam without Vietnamese

French and American cinema developed narratives upon Viet Nam to create "an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny" (Bazin: 2005: 207). Both

[2] For instance, French film directors such as Regis Wargnier with *Indochina* (1992) and Jean-Jacques Annaud with *The Lover* (1992).

French and American film directors, in recreating Viet Nam in the filmic text, have rewritten their histories to reproduce their colonial and imperialistic ideologies and values. Such directors have entrapped Viet Nam in their own national ideologies, rather than constructing it in historical terms. As Marchetti (1993) argues about the filmic Hollywood representation of Asia and the Asian, and which can equally be applied to French films on Asia, the West is interested in "a flirtation with the exotic rather than an attempt at any genuine intercultural understanding" (Marchetti: 1993:1).

The Western audience, certainly until the 1980s in Europe[3] and 1990s in the United States, were presented with a univocal representation of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese: as either the site of nostalgic French colonial desire, or as the place where many innocent American soldiers lost their lives. These portrayals derive from two specific sources: the conception of an orientalised Vietnam in French-administered Indochina, and from the American experience in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s. However, it is also, of course derived in a greater sense from the Western tradition of orientalism. This manner of presenting and authoring has, until recently, entailed a monolithic cinematic representation of Viet Nam. Essentially, the French and American film directors can be said to have orientalized Viet Nam by constructing it as their imaginary exotic *other*, discursively fixed by Western paradigms (Said: 2003).[4] The main consequence of this is that the Vietnamese have been homogenized, their identity has been erased, and imperialist views on the Vietnamese subject have been accepted as "natural" and untroubled.

[3] The audience that encountered the cinematographic work of Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung, in the 1980s, has to be considered as a niche audience interested in art cinema. The large scale distribution of Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung's short films was non-existent.

[4] Orientalism can be defined as a Western ideological doctrine which, historically, has constructed an idea of the Orient that is weaker than, or submissive to, the West. Therefore, in terms of cultural apparatus, Orientalism is an expression of Western "aggression activity, judgement, will-to-truth and knowledge" towards Asian culture (Said: 2003: 204).

Vietnamese Films on Viet Nam

The Vietnamese have created their own cinematic narrative about the French and the American invasions to suit their ideological and discursive agenda. The Vietnamese, before their national unity, made films where the main thematics centered upon the various aspects of the soldiers' lives, some of whom, like Le Ma Luong, became Vietnamese national heroes. After 1975 the Vietnamese film industry still focused on the war, but moved from the heroic gestures performed by the soldiers to the social effects the Resistance Wars had on Vietnamese people and society (Tuan:1997 in L. T. Do et al: 2004). However, such counter narrative cinematographic productions have not been readily available in Western Europe and United States. Therefore, the Western film audience had not had access to a filmic narrative that provided a challenge to the Western one. Films shot during the Anti-French Resistance War and Anti-American Resistance War, as they are known in Viet Nam, were predominantly shown in the former Communist countries. Vietnamese cinema's representation of the foreign invader was itself heavily impregnated with ideological significance which fixed the invaders culture, making them static and unchanged rather than historically constructed. In this way, it offers something of a mirror image to Western narratives.

However, between the French/American and the Vietnamese filmic representations of Viet Nam, the Vietnamese diaspora has now created an intervening zone where Western and Vietnamese filmic representations of Viet Nam collide. The hybrid nature of the films by Vietnamese-European and Vietnamese-American film directors represents the liminal space where Vietnamese and Western cinematic textualities have been transformed. The French-Vietnamese and American-Vietnamese film directors represent the post-colonial, hybrid

subject who occupies the space between Vietnamese culture and the Western one. Starting from the early 1980s in the case of the French-Vietnamese and from the early 1990s for Vietnamese-Americans, diasporic Vietnamese film directors have been making short films and feature films that provide a valuable new perspective on Vietnamese identity.

French-Vietnamese and American-Vietnamese Cinema

The thesis analyzes how the Vietnamese diaspora have rewritten their exilic journey, Vietnamese heritage and identity by challenging the French and European cinematic discourse regarding Viet Nam and the Vietnamese. The first diasporic feature film that became readily available in Europe and the United States was a movie written and directed by the French-Vietnamese Tran Anh Hung, *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993). The film was commercially released on VHS format in 1996. In the ensuing almost decade and a half, there has been a rapid increase of American and French people, of Vietnamese ancestry, that have focused on writing, making and producing feature films about their memories and history of Viet Nam.

Specifically, the focus of the thesis is films made by Vietnamese diasporic film directors between 1987 and 2006, whose main subject matter relates to Viet Nam and the exilic experience undergone by the first generation on Vietnamese-American. Indeed, this will perhaps be seen as something of a golden age for this type of cinema. Some of the most recognized diasporic directors, like Tran Anh Hung[5] and Tony Bui,[6] have, for the time being at least, shifted from representing Viet Nam to make films not related to their ancestral

[5] Tran Anh Hung in 2008 finished his film *I Come with the Rain* (2009); the French-Vietnamese film director is now editing the film *Norwegian Wood,* a cinematographic adaptation of Haruki Murakami's novel that will be released in Japan in 2010.
[6] Tony Bui is currently making the film *The Walk.*

country. Furthermore Timothy Linh Bui has moved away from representing Viet Nam in his last feature film *Power Blue* (2009). Furthermore, The Vietnamese-American film director and screenwriter Le-Van Kiet made the feature film *Dust of Life* (2007), while Charlie Nguyen, a film director, screenwriter, editor, and producer released *The Rebel* (*Dòng Máu Anh Hùng*) (2007). This process is perhaps inevitable, but for the time being at least, leaves an important subject matter far from fully addressed.

Despite American-Vietnamese and French-Vietnamese feature films becoming more easily available to the general public, some of them are still just shown in film festivals at locations across the globe. Because analyzing such films requires more than a single view[7] and that this has not been possible, the thesis therefore concentrates on the diasporic Vietnamese films that *have* been made available to purchase on DVD or VHS. Even here, finding supposedly available diasporic Vietnamese films was sometimes challenging, and required considerable amounts of time and tracing. Some films were easier to find than others: the DVD of *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), for instance, can be easily bought in video shops and the internet. *Spirit*s (2004), however, was bought in Viet Nam by a colleague because at the time it was impossible to buy on the internet and in American or European shops. Without such help and commitment, certain films could not have been included in the paper. Other films, like Lam Le's *20 Nights* (2006), are only distributed in certain countries. His film is only readily available in Italy and it is not available in English language or with English subtitles. The viewers can either watch it in French or in Italian. The translation between Italian and English language certainly dissipates part of the linguistic style which Lam Le wanted to convey to the spectator.

[7] As Naficy (2001) stated, analyzing films made by deterritorialized people involves watching, listening, reading, translating and writing.

III

The Vietnamese Diaspora in the United States of America and France: Different Nations, Different Credo, Same Aim

Brief Facts

The overseas Vietnamese are predominantly dislocated in six areas: Australia (200 000 individuals), Canada (200 000), China (300 000), France (400 000), Thailand (120 000) and the United States of America (1.3 million) (Dorais: 2001: 4). My reason for concentrating on American and French overseas Vietnamese film productions is their active participation in the film-making industry.

French Viet Kieu

The first Vietnamese arriving in France were from North Viet Nam. They settled in the South of France and in Paris' fifth arrondissement. The following waves mostly settled in Paris, in what is now the Chinese quarter, between Porte de Choisy and Place d'Italie. The Vietnamese communities have many restaurants and food shops in this area. Belleville is a residential area very popular among the Vietnamese too (Blanc: 2004). France had its first Vietnamese community in the early twentieth century. They were students and diplomats and consisted of just a few hundred of people. From 1915-1920, the French government imported Vietnamese soldier-workers, mostly from a very poor background, to settle in Southern France to work in factories producing weapons, and work in the transports and health service sectors. The French government settled them in camps. At the end of the First World War many of the Vietnamese were repatriated, but students were permitted to stay.

The second wave of Vietnamese arrived between 1920 and 1930. This migration took place primarily due to the change of law that allowed the Vietnamese to work as civil servants (Blanc: 2004: 1164). These migrants were mostly men, very often working for the French colonial maritime company. There were also chefs, a few female students and nannies. During this period the first Vietnamese associations and organizations were created by Vietnamese students in order to provide assistance to the newly arrived compatriots. From the 1930s onwards, partitocracy started to become highly ingrained in these groups. As Blanc (2004) reports, there were two main political factions: the nationalists and the Communists.

The third wave of Vietnamese immigrants arrived between 1939 and 1950. As during the First World War, these Vietnamese were recruited mainly to work in factories and were mostly concentrated around Marseilles. However, the French government also hired Vietnamese interpreters who inevitably came from a wealthy and educated background. In December 1944, the General Congress of the Indochinese in France took place. The Vietnamese association claimed independence from France. The French Government did not accept these rebellious tendencies and so it declared illegal and was dissolved. After the war, this insurrection of Vietnamese nationalists against French authority had the consequence that most of the Vietnamese living in France were repatriated. The Vietnamese associations in France were, by this period, far from having a homogenous nature. There were four main ideologies which inspired these groups: Catholicism, Communism, nationalism, and Trotskyism. However, just two of the mentioned associations managed to survive the idiosyncratic nature of the Vietnamese community: the Communist and the Viet Minh group (Blanc: 2004: 1164).

The fourth, brief, migration started in 1954, following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and ended with the signing of the Geneva Agreement of 7th July of that year. These Vietnamese were put in two camps once they arrived in France: Sainte-Livrade and Noyant d'Alliter. The fifth migration, between 1954 and 1975, mostly consisted of people seeking to continue their studies. The majority of them were from South Viet Nam. In France they prefer to call the group of the overseas Vietnamese that arrived before 1975 the "Vietnamese community" (Blanc: 2004: 1165). The last wave started when Saigon collapsed, the 30th of April 1975, and continued up until the early 1990s. They were mostly boat people seeking refuge from the persecutions they had to endure in Viet Nam under the Communist regime. These Vietnamese initially found shelter in refugee camps in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand and the Philippines. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees allocated them to Western host countries. However, many escapees, not having political refugee status, were sent back to Viet Nam where they were put in re-education camps. In France the organization *France Terre d'Asile* provided the accepted Vietnamese with houses; in the same period almost 40 refugee centres opened in France in order to help the Vietnamese refugees. Vietnamese arriving in France after the American-Vietnamese war are referred as "boat people" (Blanc: 2004: 1160).

In contemporary France there are, broadly-speaking, two politically oriented groups: the pre-1975 wave of Vietnamese, who are pro-Hanoi, and the "boat people" Vietnamese who are anti-Communist. However, both groups aim to provide a space in which Vietnamese culture can be remembered, performed, transformed and transmitted. These are the focal points that Vietnamese-descent film directors, operating outside Viet Nam, thrive upon. Vietnamese of Eurasian ethnicity living in France are numerically fewer than those of mixed descent living in the United States.

Vietnamese in the United States of America

It is estimated that, since the end of the Vietnamese-American War, three million Vietnamese have fled abroad, half of them ending up in the United States of America. However, even before the collapse of Saigon a small number of Vietnamese, mainly for educational purposes, and the Vietnamese wives and offspring of Americans working in Viet Nam, settled in the U.S.A. (Blanc: 2004: 1159). The first wave of Vietnamese hit America soon after the 30th of April 1975, the day of the fall of Saigon. Vietnamese people who had cooperated with the Government of the United States or who were members of the Republic of the Viet Nam Government left their country, fearing reprisal form the newly established Communist Government. They were very often highly educated and skilled people. Most of them were airlifted by the United States of America Government. They were temporarily put in refugee camps mainly in the Philippines, and Guam, to be later transferred to various refugee camps in the U.S.A. (Blanc: 2004: 1160). The first refugee camp to be opened for the displaced Vietnamese was Camp Pendleton, near San Diego. Indeed, Tony Buy's film *Green Dragon* (2002), which pays homage to the first wave of refugee Vietnamese, is set in Camp Pendleton. They mostly settled in California, the reason for this being, as Andrew Lam states, partly the warm climate, and also because of the generosity shown by Californians in sponsoring Vietnamese families (Lam: 2009).

The second wave of refugees began after 1978. These Vietnamese escaped from Viet Nam by boat, and were fleeing from the Communist government and its reeducation camps. They diverged from the first wave of Vietnamese refugees in the sense of generally having lower socioeconomic status (Vigil et al: 2004). The third wave of Vietnamese arrived in the United States in 1992. These were former "guests" of the Vietnamese reeducation camps, and

their arrival in the USA was sponsored by their Vietnamese-American relatives. A significant number of Vietnamese-American are of Amerasian ethnicity due to having American soldier fathers and Vietnamese mothers. It is not mere coincidence that *Heaven and Earth* (1993) and *Three Seasons* (1999) engage with this topic. These two productions narrate the story of two American veteran soldiers having had relationships with Vietnamese women and being fathers to children of mixed ethnicities.

The Vietnamese people living in the United States have been very much involved in politics. They see themselves as political refugees that have had to escape from their own country due to Communist persecution. In contrast to their French counterparts, only an insignificant minority supports Communist ideals (Blanc: 2004: 1164-5). Most Vietnamese-American publicly demonstrate their objections to the Vietnamese Government and its perceived infringements of human rights. Moreover, in contrast to the Vietnamese community in France, the Vietnamese-American community has an active role in American internal politics. There are a large number of Vietnamese-American associations spread all over the United States of America. Their main aim is to empower, look after, and offer assistance to the Vietnamese living outside Viet Nam. For both communities, however, in France and the USA, a main goal is to preserve, remember and re-create the Vietnamese culture they left behind when living Viet Nam.

Vietnamese and Displacement

The term diaspora originates from the Greek verb *dia-speirein* meaning to scatter. In broad terms, this term implies that a group of people is compelled to make a journey. There are various motives for which this journey is undertaken, such as slavery, political

persecution, and conflict. Diasporic language has been replacing what previously were called ethnic minorities and the discourses that were associated with them (Clifford: 1997). In general terms, a diaspora, to be considered as such, needs to be settled in what is called a "host society". The academic debate surrounding this concept, and the wide use of the term in the media, necessitates clarifying if the Vietnamese living abroad can be considered to be a diaspora or whether they are just living a diasporic moment of their history (Clifford: 1994).

Because media are central to this dissertation, much of this issue can be illuminated through Appadurai's (2003) idea about diaspora, dislocation and disjuncture. Appadurai (2003), borrowing from Anderson's (1991) concept of 'imagined community', explores how what he terms ethnoscapes,[8] technoscapes,[9] financescapes,[10] mediascape[11] and ideoscapes[12] have become part of imagined worlds -but still very real in the contemporary world- able to transcend the borders of the nation-state. Essential to this concept is the fact that the media now create a sense of communities with no sense of place. However, people should not think of globalization as a synonym for cultural homogeneity. There are many sites of resistance created by globalization itself (Iyer in Appadurai: 2003: 28). People are not passive entities that simply absorb messages. It is human nature to transform and modify these hegemonic models of communication. These messages are digested and transformed by the local culture. However, the referential world in which these models were born is partially lost during this assimilation/transformation by the indigenous culture. This is due to the fact that the local culture is not in complete synchrony with the world in which these referents originated from.

[8] Ethnoscopes: human motion constituting movement in world we live in
[9] Technoscapes: technologies flow permitting the proceed of information across countries
[10] Financescapes: circulation of global capital
[11] Mediascapes: electronic equipment able to produce and circulate information through the media, and the images of the world created by these media. Mediascapes, by combining fragments of reality's images and narratives, are key elements in the narratives, and phantasies, built around the "Other" subject
[12] Ideoscapes: images having to do with politics and ideologies

In other words, the signified[13] of the hegemonic culture do partially lose their significance when incorporated in an indigenous cosmology. In this context, globalization blurs in to postmodernism, the referent is alienated from the signifier. This divergency gives birth to endless reproductions of signifiers without signified. Jameson (cited in Appadurai: 2003: 28) calls these phenomena "nostalgia for the present".

Are ethnic Vietnamese film directors living abroad affected by this "nostalgia for the present" when making their films? Most of them were either born or raised from an early age in France and the Unites States of America. Timothy and Tony Bui left Viet Nam one week before the fall of Saigon. They were, respectively, five and three years old when they settled in California. Victor Vu was born and raised in Viet Nam. Tran Anh Hung emigrated to France after the fall of Saigon when he was twelve years old. Lam Le, in contrast, left Viet Nam as a young adult of nineteen. It seems fair to say, therefore, that some of these film directors are not likely to be in complete synchrony with the Vietnamese socio-economic reality. The goal for the American and French Vietnamese, as it is for all other diasporic communities, is to construct and de-construct identity. And as Naficy (2001) argues, diasporic films are characterized by themes involving journeys, historicity, identity, displacement, nostalgia and, I would add, romanticization. However, these topics are not just connotative of cinematic expression: a work of literature such as *Sunday Menu* (1998) is a short story which also contains these themes.

[13] Signified: according to Saussure is the part of the sign expressing the concept.

Theories on Diaspora

Major terms associated with the word diaspora are "ethnicity", "mobility", and "displacement". It is true that the Vietnamese living abroad do share cultural values, migration patterns and history, and ways of organizations (Dorais: 2001), but does this constitute a diaspora? Some academics, such as Connor (1986), define diaspora in very general terms as any group of people living outside their homeland. Others, such as Bruneau (cited in Dorais: 2001: 4), are more specific to what can be described as a diasporic communities. In fact, Bruneau finds that there are three typologies of this kind. First of all there are diasporas revolving around business. The second type of diasporic community is structured around the practice of a religion; a typical example of this is the Jewish diaspora. The third and final one concern diasporas organized around politics, especially when their home-country is under foreign occupation. This definition of diaspora is centered on ideas of displacement and connectivity. While not disputing that narratives based upon notions of displacement and migrancy are central to contemporary notions of what constitutes a diaspora, it does not seem, of itself, fully adequate, for reasons that will become clear below.

Safran (1991: 83-99) offers a restrictive definition of diaspora which is problematical. In order for a diaspora to be considered as such, it has, in this definition, to adhere to six 'canons': First of all, their ancestors should come from a central point of origin and they should be scattered in two or more foreign locations. Second, they have to share a collective mythical memory about their land of origin. Thirdly, they feel isolated and alienated in their host country. Fourthly, they consider their home land as an ideal location where they wish to return. Fifthly, they have to actively restore freedom from danger and wealth in their country of origin. Lastly, they believe that the interaction among their ethnic community is the base

for solidarity and collective consciousness. Safran's canons, in defining diaspora, are so restrictive that certain transnational communities, such as the Chinese, cannot be defined as such. These parameters - centered on the ideal of homeland- marginalize the importance of relationships and linkages formed by the diasporic conditions. Diasporic identities are formed out of the experiences of displacement, settlement, on building a new "home" in their host country rather than having a fixation with their homeland. Diasporas' imagery does not solely concentrate on keeping links, and in identifying, with their countries of origin but also by the ability they have in negotiating their identities. That's the key point of postcolonial studies, the ability of displaced groups to form a space - referred to as third space, a site of negotiation and assimilation between the country of origin and the host country's culture - . As Hall (1993) clarifies, despite the fact that there are the links and chances for such communities to return into the homeland they left, the homeland which these ethnic groups imagine, the place itself that they have left can be deeply transformed and unrecognizable. The definition of diaspora elaborated by Safran (1991) has been enlarged by Cohen (1997), in a way that makes it more functional. He adds four points: inclusion of groups scattered due to aggression, persecution or hardship; time is a necessity that has to be taken in account in order for an ethnic community living abroad to be defined as a diaspora; the potential identity redefinition and recreation of diasporic communities; finally, recognizing that diasporic communities share a collective identity with their homeland and the country they live in, but also with their ethnic communities living in different countries. Cohen's definition encompasses the sense of loss and displacement, thereby offering a more creative vision of diaspora. Nonetheless, it remains not fully adequate: Cohen (1997) fails to identify what Tölölyan (1996) characterises as modern transnational mobility that diversifies diasporic experiences.

Tölölyan (1996), however, urges a definition of diaspora that includes the following concepts: a group of people forced to leave their home country due to social or economic deprivations can be defined as a diaspora; these people, even before leaving their country of origin, shared socio-cultural customs; these communities maintain or reshape their collective memory. This represents a pillar of their identity; the ethnic communities keep well-defined cultural boundaries in their host country; diasporic groups are willing to keep contact among themselves; they aim to keep contact with their ancestral land, if still existing. The most challenging and important notion in Tölölyan's notion of diaspora derives from the idea that diasporic communities are willing to keep contact with their homeland. In order to fulfill this aim, diasporic groups need the help of transnational model of communication, shared values and organizations. Bruneau (cited in Dorais: 2001) suffers from neglecting the key role that media technologies play in reinventing and reconstructing a diaspora: ethnic groups who do not possess such a network of communications are thereby not fully able to share collective values and fully organizational tools, and therefore cannot be considered as diasporic groups. According to Tölölyan's definition, the Vietnamese living abroad can then be considered as being a diaspora. I argue that Vietnamese people living abroad do constitute a diaspora for the following reasons:

- Vietnamese living abroad left Viet Nam due to a very unstable and deprived political situation
- Vietnamese groups living outside of Viet Nam do share socio-cultural customs
- Vietnamese people living abroad have a collective memory
- Although the first generation of Vietnamese people living outside of Viet Nam culturally kept themselves separated from the mainstream culture of their host countries, following generations have amalgamated with mainstream culture and society

- The Vietnamese living outside Viet Nam do keep in contact among themselves.
- The ethnic Vietnamese living outside of Viet Nam keep in contact with their country of origin.

The Diaspora, Globalisation and Mediation

As Dorais (2001) points out, the majority of Vietnamese groups living in Europe and North America share the same cultural values, migration history, and social organization, and that one of the tools that has enabled this sharing of identity is media technologies. As mentioned above, Appadurai (2003) was one of the first scholars to identify how new technologies have an impact in the creation of diasporic communities. Borrowing from Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined community, he explored imagined worlds, but still very real in the contemporary world, which are able to transcend the geographical borders of the nation-state. The idea of a boundless nation-state can be seen as undermining the diversity of indigenous voices because of the global power exerted by media and financial corporations. However, this globalized world has actually become more glocalized.[14] A multitude of ethnic voices are, in fact, becoming more heard in the world.

It has been argued that globalization is a synonym of homogenization; the so-called McDonaldization of Society (Ritzer: 1993) is a typical articulation of a predictable and homogeneous society. Globalisation, however, also conveys ideas of heterogeneity and unforeseeability. An example of cultural diversity, that challenges the idea of a homogeneous globalization, is provided by the Vietnamese diaspora settling in Orange County, California. They created Little Saigon, an enclave dedicated to post-colonial Vietnamese culture that

[14] The term *glocalisation* is a combination of the words globalisation and localisation. It is uses to describe a product/service that is distributed globally, but also accommodates the consumer/user of the local market.

conveys both Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese ethnic groups. This example shows that people should not think of globalization purely as a synonym for cultural homogeneity. There are many sites of resistance created by globalization itself (Iyer in Appadurai: 2003). People are not passive entities that simply passively absorb messages. It is human nature to transform and modify these hegemonic models of communication. These messages are digested and transformed by the local culture. For people seeing these ethnic traditions as alien, these scapes constitute a site for people to create narratives of the other. It allows people outside these scapes to 'fantasize', to get a critical or discursive introduction to the "outsiders". On the other hand, people of the diaspora, being part of these -scapes, have a perception of them as meanings of mediation between the culture of the country they currently live in, and the one of their ethnic origin. It is possible to perceive scapes as mediating elements between two cultures whose referential systems could, sometimes, be at the antipodes of one another, and therefore, that these systems could carry problems of both a semantic and pragmatic nature. Appadurai (2003) argues how problematic it is to translate texts transculturally. The films made by ethnic Vietnamese people living abroad are subject to the same fate. First of all there are disjunctures in the way a Vietnamese living in Viet Nam perceives these films. The Vietnamese living in Viet Nam may see these films as anti-patriotic and lame. Secondly, Westerners of non Vietnamese descent, not being fully aware of Vietnamese culture and traditions, may respond by exoticizing the images of Vietnamese people and landscapes they are presented with. In these instances, Appadurai (2003) argues that ideoscapes take different shapes if consumed in a national or transnational context.

The referential world in which the 'scapes' model was born is partially lost during this assimilation and/or transformation by the indigenous culture. This is due to the fact that the local culture is not in complete synchrony with the world from which these referents

originated. In other words, the signified of the hegemonic culture does partially lose its significance when incorporated in an indigenous cosmology. In this context, globalization blurs into postmodernism, the referent is alienated from the signifier. This divergence gives birth to endless reproductions of signifiers without signified. Jameson (1991: 18-19) calls these phenomena "nostalgia for the present". Are ethnic Vietnamese film directors living abroad affected by this "nostalgia for the present" when writing their screenplays? Have the people from the Vietnamese diaspora lost the referent world they show when making their films? Do the diasporic Vietnamese artists replicate symbols whose signified has been lost? After all, most of the Vietnamese diasporic film directors were, as mentioned above, either born, or raised from an early age, in France and the United States of America. It is therefore useful to focus, for a moment, on the politics of displacement and deterritorialization, and they way in which Vietnamese people living abroad incorporate or reject Vietnamese communal identity.

Displacement and Deterritorialization

It is almost certain that some of these film directors are not in complete synchrony with the signified of traditional Vietnamese practices. However, it cannot be denied or ignored that Vietnamese living outside of Viet Nam have the need to reminisce and to get in contact with their ancestral land. This phenomenon, called deterritorialization, creates new markets for diasporic communities to get in contact with their familial land. Politically, deterritorialization creates religious and political groups and association in which there are present complex matrixes of religious and political identification. There are, for instance, the *Chua Bo De* (a Vietnamese Buddhist temple based in New Orleans) and the *Chinh Phu Lam Thoi Viet Nam Tu Do* (Government of Free Viet Nam, a political organization based in Texas

mostly financed by ethnically Vietnamese businesspersons living around the world). In terms of mediascapes, deterritorialization creates new markets for the media industry. Vietnamese diasporic cinema and art productions are expressions of the need to identify with an ancestral land. The *Vietnamese American Art & Letters Association* (VAALA) is a clear example of organization being born due to deterritorialization and need to congregate Vietnamese artists. Its motto exemplifies these values: "Make art. Create Community".

A typical flyer illustrates what the VAALA 's aims are: for instance, the aim of the event *F.O.B. II: Art Speaks / F.O.B. II: Nghệ Thuật Lên Tiếng @ the crossroads of Art + Politics + Community* is to discuss diasporic Vietnamese community identity and what the community were able to say, both nationally and internationally, in the arts context.[15] This also shows how crucially important it is to express, define, shape, and claim back the identity of the Vietnamese diasporic communities, through artistic practices. Equally important is the recent creation of the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN), which aims to promote artists from the Vietnamese diaspora whose work in literature, visual art, film, and performance art enriches our communities and strengthens ties between Vietnamese across the globe (http://www.dvanonline.org/).

It is very important to emphasise that the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network refers to itself as a diasporic group. This example reinforces the point previously made in defining Vietnamese people living abroad as a diaspora. Background is a crucial issue in shaping diasporic groups' identity. The quest, in diasporic communities, to reinforce, create and reshape identities is not, however, limited to the arts. This process also takes place on a daily basis and manifests itself in different ways: from the language people choose to speak,

[15] See http://www.vaala.org/081221-FOB-News.php

to the clothes they decide to wear, to the way they choose to behave (if they respect the cultural norms/values their families wish them to follow), and by the food they choose to eat. In the case of food, the artistic and the everyday can overlap. A central theme of this work is an analysis of how, for Vietnamese diasporic filmmakers, identity is expressed and transmitted *synesthetically* through their work. The presence of, particularly, food and eating in Vietnamese diasporic film is therefore highly significant. Appadurai (2001) examines how, in the globalized world, subjectivities are formed by bridging consumption practices and cultural diversities. Different food consumption patterns are indicative of diverse forms of belonging. Therefore, following this idea, food can be seen as symbolic of both reinforcing and mitigating ethnic identities. As I show in Chapter Five, the portrayal of food and eating are essential to understanding identity in Vietnamese diasporic cinema.

IV

Themes in Vietnamese Diasporic Cinema

A Quest for Diasporic Vietnamese Identity through Diasporic Vietnamese Cinema

From cinema to literature and visual and performance arts, the Vietnamese diaspora, in both France and the United States of America, has been trying to define and mediate its collective identity. The Vietnamese diaspora has defined its identities by creating spaces for the Vietnamese people to re-create a community within their host countries. At the same time Vietnamese people living outside of Viet Nam have been mediating their collective identity by displaying their work to an international audience. As argued by Appadurai (2003), 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes' are responsible for the creation and spread of the cultural artifacts of the Vietnamese groups living outside of Viet Nam. With the advent of the Internet the media flow, especially concerning non-mainstream media, is livelier and more accessible than ever. Thanks to this fast flow of information, technologies and capital, the Vietnamese living abroad are more cohesive, and active, than ever before. Moreover, these flows give these groups the chance to be known, especially in Western countries, also by the non-Vietnamese. The quest for the American and French Vietnamese, as for all diasporic communities, is about constructing and de-constructing identity(ies). As Naficy (2001) argues, diasporic films are characterized by themes involving journeys, historicity, identity, displacement, nostalgia and romanticization. In particular, the search for identity in Vietnamese diasporic cinema and the nostalgia of the film maker focuses on a small number of themes: food, male and female roles and Confucian family values.

Food, Film and the Vietnamese Diaspora

Food has been generally thought of as being peripheral in art and film analysis. Synnott (1991) argues that visuality and hearing have traditionally been classified as higher senses than those related to taste and tact. However, particularly in the past twenty years with the advent of postcolonial studies, the academy has started to focus more on the ethnic identity, global communication, interculturality and translatability associated with food and its consumption. In film studies, scholars such as Ferry (2003) and Keller (2006) argue that food in films serves the purpose of abstract cultural processes, such as nationality, ethnicity, history, geography and politics, and more subjective ones such as carnal desires and love. As I explore in greater detail in the next chapter, an appreciation of the role of food in film is an essential part of understanding Vietnamese diasporic identity. The racial discrimination and stereotype which frame the Vietnamese as exotic and feminine individuals in American and French films are not merely expressed in the ways in which they are framed and talked about on camera: Western film directors have also discriminated against Viet Nam and the Vietnamese on the plate. In Western films on Viet Nam, especially American ones, the American hero is often framed eating meat because, in Western symbolism, meat is associated with masculinity. On the other hand, the Vietnamese are shown as consuming grains, vegetables, and fruit because in Western symbolism they are products associated with femininity, as Jackson (1993: 47) has argued.

However, the symbolic functions of food, and the complex meanings attached to it, are often naturalized and such functions have been neglected when analyzing films. Jackson's (1996) analysis of food consumption, however, with its symbolic and metaphoric associations demonstrates how Western film directors have imagined and identified the Vietnamese based

on food consumption. While food creates differences between the *Other* and the rest, it also has a binding function in reinforcing people sharing a collective identity. Food in films conveys to the viewer the *synesthetic* sensations that make the audience recreate a full sensorial response to something that is, technically, merely a visual and auditorial experience. Marks (2000) argues that intercultural[16] cinema consciously uses sensorial experiences, rather than relying on visuality, to embody sensual memories that have otherwise been ignored by the European and American audience. The Vietnamese diasporic film directors use their films' characters' bodies as sites of cultural memory, and they use the characters' bodies to consume their ethnic identity through ethnic food consumption. Furthermore such sensual stimulation enables the Western viewer to poly-sense the 'Vietnameseness' and hybridity that the author specifically wants the public to access.

Despite differences in the ways they perceive politics, the Vietnamese living outside of Viet Nam share broadly the same cultural values, migration history and social organizations (Dorais:2001). Traditional Vietnamese food, consumed outside of Viet Nam, is one of the realms that define Vietnamese ethnicity located externally from Viet Nam. Food is part of what Appadurai (2001) argues is part of consumption practices and cultural diversities that gives birth to global and liminal subjectivities. Therefore, analyzing food in diasporic film productions means accessing their diasporic, hybridized identity. Food, however, is not only fundamental in shaping the contemporary hybrid diasporic Vietnamese shared identity. The Vietnamese, in the French colonial era for instance, incorporated the colonizers' eating habits in order to become less distinguishable from the French (Peters: 2001: 22). Nowadays, the French and American film directors incorporate Vietnamese traditional cuisine to reinforce their belonging to the Vietnamese part of their identity. However, the diasporic

16 As argued by Marks (2000) intercultural cinema is characterized by its borrowing from many cultural traditions. Intercultural cinema represents the liminal point where Euro-American cinema is integrated with a non-Western ethnicity.

Vietnamese film directors refer to an *imagined* Viet Nam in their films, and their portrayal of food is a clear indicator of that. Indeed, the ethnic food the Vietnamese diaspora eat actually far more closely resembles traditional Vietnamese food than what the Vietnamese actually ate in communist Viet Nam particularly pre- *Doi Moi*.[17] Vietnamese diasporic film directors frame ingredients associated with the pre-colonial traditional Vietnamese culture, in doing so they are showing the "updated" notion of Vietnameseness typical of the exilic experience (Naficy: 2001).

Despite food appearing sporadically in certain films analysed, its symbolic function is so important in shaping diasporic Vietnamese identity that it must not and cannot be neglected in the analysis of diasporic Vietnamese film. The kitchen sphere-and therefore food- in Viet Nam and in Vietnamese diasporic cinema, is, in gender ideology, associated with the feminine figure (Hue-Tam: 2001 and Thomas: 2004). Analyzing the symbolic role food has in reshaping and reinforcing Vietnamese diasporic identity would be incomplete without also examining how the idea of Vietnamese femininity has been constructed in the cinematic productions created by diasporic Vietnamese film directors.

Women in Vietnamese Diasporic film

The tension between traditional Viet Nam and the diasporic Vietnamese contemporary experience is clearly symbolized by the portrayal of women in diasporic film. Most such films frame Vietnamese women as being the central characters to the plot. This work analyzes how Vietnamese women are portrayed by French-Vietnamese and American-Vietnamese film directors (all of those covered by this work are male). Furthermore, it

[17] *Doi Moi* is the term used to describe the free market economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986. The central idea of the reform being that that continuing state oversight of the economy would now be supplemented with a significant role for private enterprise. In other words, a socialist market economy was to be established.

evaluates how women are narrated by such film makers and compares this with the experience of womanhood in the writings of Vietnamese diasporic women themselves, and on texts which focus on the experience of these women. Vietnamese women living in the United States and Europe experience a split identity. The Vietnamese diasporic men expect them to conform to the idea of classical Vietnamese femininity, while at the same time women have to negotiate their hybrid identity in societies where such values are considered to be backwards and linked to the suppression of women's rights.

Thao (2002) illustrates how Vietnamese men of the so-called *1.5 generation* found diasporic Vietnamese women to be "Americanized" therefore they would rather marry a "real" Vietnamese woman than a hybrid one:[18]

> Vietnamese women here and Vietnamese women in Vietnam are so very different! My first wife was rude, loud, and controlling. She was lazy too and she decided she had no obligation to do chores if she didn't want to. She said that everything must be equal. I don't think so! (Thao: 2002:116).

The Vietnamese diasporic woman inhabits a liminal state between the virtuous identity associated with Vietnamese Confucian society and the more liberal status offered by the French and American mainstream society. They have written about the struggles they have had to become independent and partially break away from traditional patriarchal power. For instance, Pauline Nguyen (2007), an Australian-Vietnamese woman, has written about the struggle she endured with her family to have access to an Australian life, rather than be condemned to the restricted life that her family, and especially her father, wanted to impose upon her. However, it is also true that such problems are not only visible in diasporic

[18] The term *1.5 Generation* or *1.5 G* is used to describe individuals who immigrate to another country early in life, before or during their early teens. They earn the label the "*1.5 generation*" because they bring with them characteristics from their home country but continue their assimilation and socialization in the new country. Their identity is thus a combination of new and old cultures and traditions. (Roberge: 2005).

Vietnamese communities. The Vietnamese diasporic scholar Hue-Tam (2001: 168) argues that contemporary Vietnamese society presents the same idiosyncrasies in defining the multiple roles occupied by women.

Egan (1999: 129) suggests that the American-Vietnamese woman is quintessentially virtuous and submissive, much as she is expected to be in traditional Vietnamese culture, even if she is now part of Northern American or European society. While some Vietnamese film directors, such as Tran Anh Hung, frame women in an unquestioningly subservient role to male dominated sphere, others such as Victor Vu in *First Morning* (2003) do question the Vietnamese male authority inflicting Confucian views upon their daughters. Moreover, Victor Vu in the same production also explores the problems of Vietnamese wives, living in a Western reality, needing extreme resilience to rebel against Confucian hierarchical values. This problematic is central to the portrayal of women by French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American film directors. The thesis analyses how Vietnamese film directors have negotiated, and to what extent redefined, the identity of the ethnically Vietnamese female in their productions.

The Male in Diasporic Vietnamese Cinema

Hue-Tam (2001: 170) claimed that the notion of the caring and loving mother is contrasted with the traditional idea of the Vietnamese father as being unreliable, and emotionally and physically absent. The Vietnamese classical myths of *The Waiting Stone* (*Hon Vong Phu*) and *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (*Thieu Phu Nam Xuong*) reflect upon men's apparent superficial and untrustworthy nature. Such classical Vietnamese stories and notions have been transformed into cinematographic narratives by Tran Anh Hung and

Lam Le. Both film makers reinforce the image of the Vietnamese male as an authoritarian character. The American-Vietnamese scholar Hue-Tam suggests, for instance, that *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1991) exemplifies the virtuosity and self-sacrifice traditionally associated with the mother, and the frivolous-but-strict nature typically associated with the father. In the Vietnamese diaspora, the father figure is often portrayed as an authoritarian figure who wants to impose his Confucian moral values upon his daughters and wives, but also on his male offspring. Lam (2005: 83), for example, reminds his reader of this on various occasions, such as when his father did not want Lam to study humanist subjects at university. To date, this framework of the stern, conservative father remains unchallenged, although the notion that this is positive does not.

The young generation of Vietnamese diasporic men found themselves to be in a liminal area where they have had to mediate between Vietnamese traditional culture, and the Western one they had to acquire in order to be able to survive in a space where Vietnamese culture was almost absent:

> In America one feels little weight of history. The past is not important the future is always bright. [...] As a teenager I intrinsically understood that in order to have any control in my own life, I had better embrace the second narrative [the American one] and go down that road as fast and furiously as I could, wherever it would take me. [...] For a Vietnamese child who was once ruled by rigid Confucian mores there is nothing so thrilling yet fraught with guilt as learning to disobey. [...] The immigrant child, wanting the larger world, shunning the old ways, inexorably breaks his parents' hearts (Lam: 2005: 34-35).

Such generational differences in approach to the idea of the male- and father's- role and status have created generational tensions which are reflected and explored in Vietnamese

diasporic film, a common theme of which is a portrayal of the father figure as authoritarian, lazy and interested in other women more than their own wives.

Vietnamese Diasporic Film and Family

The hybridity experienced by Vietnamese diasporic people is also reflected in the relations they have within *the family*, which still constitutes the central focus of the Vietnamese diasporic communities. However conflictual the relationship among family members who belong to different generations and have contrasting cultural values, the family is still *considered* to be of primal importance to the formation of the diasporic Vietnamese identity (Nguyen and King: 2004). However, in the exodus endured by the Vietnamese diaspora, this traditional idea has been tested to its limits, with the family unit in practice undergoing a tremendous amount of stress and fragmentation (Lam: 2005). An important element of Vietnamese diasporic film is the representation of the fractures and fragmentation experienced by the Vietnamese family unit, central in Confucian culture. In particular, this aspect is portrayed as a consequence of the more general Vietnamese displacement caused by the American-Vietnamese conflict, and also by the damaging effects that Western capitalism has now had upon contemporary Vietnamese society.

On Film Analysis

Analyzing and interpreting films can present difficulties. Films can be seen as texts; texts can be interpreted in multiple ways. According to Ricoeur (1985) the text is independent from the author's intent and original audience. Therefore, the text's reader determines the meaning of the text. Also not to be forgotten is the importance of the historicity in

interpreting texts, and, in this particular instance, films. As widely discussed by Ricoeur (1984) historical time becomes vital to the interpretation "to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Ricoeur: 1984:52). However, my filmic analysis of the cinematic productions of Vietnamese diasporic film directors is centered on the notion, in opposition to Ricoeur, of the author as having an impact; as such it adapts the position of Naficy (2001) in his research on "accented cinema".[19] This work considers the author in the poststructuralist manner, with the idea of the author's image being located within the filmic text itself. Following this poststructuralist notion of the author, the text can be regarded as a means for propagating the author's ideology; authorship is considered as integrated in the textual work (Freise: 1997: 132). Diasporic Vietnamese cinema can be understood as authorial because the film makers clearly inscribe their own- and their families- historical experiences in the film text and express issues which arise from this. The films' meanings for identity can be discovered only by accepting this premise. Furthermore, this perception is reinforced by how, in making such films, the film-makers generally take on not just directing but a number of key roles in making their films which means that it is very much *their* products that are being analyzed.

This extensive control over their cinematic productions has been discussed by Naficy (2001), and is shown by the Vietnamese film directors' methods of production which involves the director taking on multiple roles (precisely what varies from film to film) in creating the film: often editing, screenwriting and producing as well as directing. An illustration of the determination of the diasporic Vietnamese film directors to be the author of their films, is given by Ham Tran who, when asked to change his film *Journey from the Fall*

[19] *Accented Cinema* refers to the output of film makers who grew up in the Third World but who have since worked in the West and also those who have grown up as part of Western diasporic communities.

(2006), refused, saying that he wanted to make a film on his own terms (Larsen:2007). In these terms, as discussed by Freise in his analysis of the poststructural author, "the real world turns out to be the real world, and the real author turns out to be a fictional phenomenon" (136:1997).

Another issue arising from the methodical examination of films made by members of diasporic communities relates to the notion of cultural hegemony. The Interpretation of films, made by diasporic film directors (and more broadly any cultural product made by this community) by someone who is not part of the examined ethnic community, can trigger comments which are informed by what Appiah (1992) defines as pseudo-universal theories imposed by Eurocentric thinking upon cinema. In other words, Appiah (1992) argues that it is misleading and hegemonic in analyzing a non-Western artifact through Western eyes. However, there are four main reasons for believing that such paradigms cannot be applied to Vietnamese diasporic cinema. Firstly, although some of the films made by the Vietnamese descent film directors have been classified as Vietnamese cinema, these films are not made by specifically 'Asian' individuals. They are written, produced, and edited in Europe or the United States of America by film directors who have a hybrid culture that is partially composed of, and influenced by, Western culture and cinematographic traditions. Secondly, all the Vietnamese film directors have studied in French or American schools where the teaching model is a Western one. Thirdly, the main bodies financing the films are Americans or/and Europeans. Finally, the majority of the films are not actually shot on location in Viet Nam, mostly due to the rigid and dogmatic bureaucracy imposed by the Vietnamese Government, which, as argued by Lam Le (2006), impedes the movements of film directors.

It would be patronizing and naive to confine the identity of diasporic people to being merely the products of cultural traditions of their country of origin. Vietnamese people, living abroad, have incorporated, mediated and shaped the culture and customs of the country in which they live. The generation of French Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American film directors, having studied film in the Eurocentric zone, are not immune themselves from Eurocentric discourses. They are part of Western society, and therefore absorb and transform the reality in which they live. It is not disputed that hegemonic trends can be transformed and modified, but it is has to be recognized that they are still, in some respects, embedded in the films made by the diasporic Vietnamese communities, in both France and the United States of America. Thus, the films made by the Vietnamese diaspora cannot be considered to be positioned in complete antithesis to Western productions models and they marginally, if at all, fit into the category of third cinema.[20] Trinh T. Minh-ha (1992), for instance, acknowledges the hybrid and liminal position of the diasporic filmmaker, being in constant negotiation between two positions. This liminal and interstitial space occupied by the Vietnamese diasporic film directors is what Bhabha (1994: 2) defined as "third space".

Method

In its analysis of diasporic filmic production, the thesis will use the theoretical framework proposed by Naficy (2001) in his analysis of 'accented cinema', in which the 'author' has a central role, and which specifically looks at the condition of the diasporic film maker. My argument is also influenced by the sensorial filmic analysis that Marks (2000) regards as an integral part of intercultural cinema. Marks' discussion of intercultural cinema

[20] This term relates to films made by specific countries, and continents, in relation to their global sphere of economic influence (Hayward: 2000). However, defining third cinema is highly problematic. Stam and Shohat (in Guneratne and Dissanayake: 2003) analyze this issue in depth, giving a good account about the nature of Third cinema.

specifically relates to hybrid, post-colonial, interstitial, anti-racist or Third cinema. Specifically, the term inter-cultural highlights that the film is not mono-cultural but, rather, mediates between two cultures. These works are essential to gaining an understanding of identity in disaporic Vietnamese cinema. A full discussion of these and other important theoretical works follows in the review of literature.

Furthermore, interviews made with the French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American film directors are also used to analyze the filmic texts the Vietnamese film directors have presented their viewers with. Some ethnic references, particularly linguistic, cannot easily be detected by an interpreter who is not familiar with the language the films are shot in. Cultural symbols, on the contrary, can be translated if the interpreter is able to access the culture and ideology of the Vietnamese diaspora and their country of origin. Furthermore, to access, as far as possible, the culture and customs of the Vietnamese diaspora, the thesis explores the writing- novels, essays, poems- of the Vietnamese diaspora which focus on their expressions of identity, exile, dislocation, memory and nostalgia. Primary sources are used in order to grasp, without intermediaries which would further "alter" the interpretation of such texts, the full experience undergone by the Vietnamese diaspora in their dislocation period, their adaptation to a new "home', and, in some cases, their eventual return to their country of origin.

V

The Synesthetic Experience: Why Food and Eating are Essential to Diasporic Film Analysis

Food is a recurrent element in films, but it does more than satiate the appetite of film characters. Food in film narratives also reveals the sociological and cultural arrangements of social life, and shifts in cultural identity. In particular, food can give the viewer a better understanding of the identity and social and cultural background of a film's characters. It is only relatively recently, however, that the use of food as a tool of analysis has become accepted in cultural and media studies. This is due primarily to the downplaying of the role and significance of the senses, and in particular the non-visual senses, in the history of Western thought.

In the Western world, the gustatory sense has been long ignored in the arts, film and cultural studies. Downplaying the importance of what is called *synesthetic* (derived from the Greek words *syn* [together] and *aisthetis* [perception] experience as a vital component of film analysis entails not adequately being able to experience the film. This state of affairs has arisen from the longstanding belief that taste is one of the lower senses of perception, and that, more generally, sense perception is subordinate to reason. Such a philosophical standpoint has evolved, primarily, from the thought and all-pervading influence of Plato and Aristotle (Synnott: 1991: 61-76). However, even earlier Greek philosophers, such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles distrusted the senses and created a mind and body dichotomy that ranks the mind – which for them includes sight and hearing- as epistemologically and metaphysically superior to the senses of smell, taste and touch.

The Categorization of Senses: from Plato to the Present Day

Plato, in the *Republic*, stated that the tripartite soul has three main components in which the 'many-headed beast' corresponds to the appetites (taste, touch and smell), the 'lion' is considered the principal component and the 'man' is reason. He argues that if the multi-headed beast takes over, humans will become the enemies of philosophy and culture, capable of destroying the divine element embedded in each one of them. Not being able to be in touch with the divine signifies becoming inhuman, which in turn means being unable to understand culture. For Plato the social structure of the Republic represented the superiority of mind over the sensual body: the guardian or philosopher being the head and corresponding to the reason, the highest authority; the warriors, the heart corresponding to the courage; and the farms and artisans being the belly corresponding to the senses (Synnott: 1991: 61-76). Aristotle, although arguing that sensorial pleasure is a necessity for human goodness and knowledge, states that sight and hearing are the noblest of sensorial perceptions due to their use in learning and acquiring culture. Touch and taste are perceived as 'animal senses', which are responsible for making humans morally vulnerable through lust and gluttony.

The early Christians also saw the senses in a very ambivalent way. Christ had seen senses as being an essential part of the human condition. However, Christ warned that senses should not be an end to themselves. This belief was developed by early Christians such as Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius Loyola whose dualistic ascetic traditions preached that the senses were the obstacle to spiritual growth. In a similar way, Saint Augustine wrote that, although the senses are ways in which the glory of God can be experienced, they are dangerous acts leading to sin (Synnott: 1991: 63). In the Middle Ages, ascetic practices were still privileged over sensorial ones. Saint Thomas Aquinas privileged sight over all other

senses, which the philosopher described as an impediment towards illumination. To this extent his view can be said to be a development of Plato and Aristotle. However, Aquinas went further than the ancients by stating that even sight and hearing were obstacles towards the vision of God, and, implicitly, to the development of the intellect. Saint Ignatius Loyola shared this attitude towards the sensorium (Synnott: 1991: 63).

Following the upheavals of the Renaissance and, more particularly, the Scientific Revolution, a shift in approach occurred that saw experience and the senses being explored from a less moralistic and more scientific approach. However, this had limited consequences for the gustatory component of sense experience. Descartes, for instance, explored the role of the senses in his celebrated *Meditations*. However, he perceived the senses to be potentially deceiving, causing a distortion of reality. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that, in a general sense, classical notions were gradually changing in a shifting intellectual climate that saw the rise of experience and experiment as valid forms of scientific endeavour, without which today's broad analytical tools would not exist. Nonetheless, the dominant classical thinkers continued to cast a huge shadow over analytical thought. If in the eighteenth century, an empiricist such as Hume perceived the senses as a vehicle of pleasure over the depressing reason, this was not really to undermine the primacy of the latter (Synnott: 1991: 67). The nineteenth century saw a further shift in ideas of the senses: Hegel thought of the sensory apparatus as an integral part of the body, and the instrument of communication, and expression, of the soul and Marx believed that sense deprivation dehumanises and alienates individuals. However, as a primary means for actually understanding the world, the 'lower' senses remained essentially irrelevant.

If, in the twentieth century analysis of the 'lower' senses has become more accepted, this has been mostly due to the rise and development of social scientific areas, in particular anthropology, which has now provided many classification and interpretations of the human sensorium. The anthropology of the senses looks at how societies classify the world using different senses to make sense of the world, strongly criticize the visual bias dominant in Western societies: "It is the task of the scholar to uncover the distinctions and interrelationships of sensory meaning and practices particular to a culture." (Classen: 1997: 401) Anthropologists have had major responsibility for reevaluating traditional ideas of the role of the senses, and challenging the hierarchy of the senses in Western thought. My aim in the next section is to show how films made by film directors of Vietnamese descent, living outside Viet Nam, can be fruitfully analyzed using this synesthetic approach; Vietnamese diasporic films make numerous references to food and its consumption.

Food in Film

According to Korsmeyer (1999), the instinctual need of humans, and living creatures for eating is one of the factors that have caused this neglect of taste. Taste, food, eating and drinking have been considered ephemeral activities –probably due to their implicit nature in everyday practices- in narrative and visual arts. However, eating is an activity which, in fact, embraces many cultural aspects such as ceremonial, religious and civic rituals. As a stark illustration of how film theory and critics have ignored the significance of food in films, the first book that analysed the significance and symbolic aspects of food in filmic and theatrical production was only published as recently as 1999: *Reel Meals, Set Meals: Food in Film and Theatre* by Gaye Poole. This work looks at significance and symbolism in preparation, cooking, eating, taste and also the ways in which food and eating are can be seen as codes to

be analysed. Korsmeyer (1999: 2-3) states that the gustatory sense has been overlooked until recently due to the fact that taste, smell and touch are the three senses morally difficult to control due to their potential immoral seductiveness –the sins of gluttony and lust- they represents in Western culture. Moreover, while the visual and audio components of sense perception have been classified as masculine traits and virtues, the bodily senses are seen as being feminine and therefore lacking the highly intellectual cultural values of the former. Taste, being a bodily, female, inferior sense, has not being explored in narrative and visual arts until recent times, and remains underinvestigated.

Food functions are symbolic and meaningful ways of representing and expressing, and adapting Korsmeyer's (1999: 146) idea that food carries the same symbolic values as art, I claim that food in films - cinematic productions being forms of art- is a vital component in film analysis. The need to analyse food is perhaps even more central to understanding films made by individuals belonging to diasporic communities. Many case studies, for instance Kalymnos emigrants eating -patterns examined by Sutton (2001) and Gillespie's (1995) study of Indian food consumption and identity in Southall, London, demonstrate how ethnic food, from emigrants' countries of origin, is central to the building and keeping of identity in diasporic communities, and is sometimes also used as a tool to dissociate from the familiar ethnic identity in order to manipulate and acquire the one offered by the host country. The studies mentioned clearly show how food and eating is affected by symbolic associations and metaphoric attributions.

The depiction of food by film directors of Vietnamese descent is highly symbolical and metaphorical. In fact, rather than simply reflecting ordinary dietary requirements, cultural eating patterns signify and symbolize cultural and social values, meanings, and beliefs.

Therefore, when food is presented, represented and consumed in films, it carries social and cultural values. In film analysis neglecting food signifies ignoring part of the social and cultural values carried by the film. In *At the Height of Summer*, for instance, not analyzing the values carried by the food that the sisters are preparing for the anniversary of their parents' death would mean neglecting a considerable part of the cultural and social values and tension that Tran Anh Hung depicts in this movie. In *Green Dragon*, the will and recognition that it is possible to adapt to the USA and to start building a Vietnamese community in a foreign land is symbolized by the growth of the chilli pepper plant in Camp Pendleton. What makes Vietnamese diasporic films even more suited to filmic food analysis is the fact that they are made by Vietnamese people -some first, others second generation- living abroad; as mentioned above, food is a powerful symbolic tool to show ethnically adapting, rejecting or modifying identities, cultural and social values.

Food Symbolism

Food carries a vast array of social and cultural connotations and signifiers. Eating is not just an expression of a dietary requirement but meaning, social values and beliefs which signpost how and what people eat. Consuming food is a cultural affair organized in a structured social fashion: this can relate, *inter alia*, to table manners, the way of presenting dishes and the different foods prepared for different occasion. Cultural meanings, social status, and wealth can all be expressed while preparing and consuming a meal. Habits concerned with dietary patterns have got particular significance in a particular culture. Eating is a way in which we taste the outside world, and we transform it into our own. By consuming food, the products of the outside world enter our bodies and remake or break social identities and membership to a social group. Eating patterns are culturally-based. Food

habits reflect society's structure and social relationship in the community in which they do occur. Levi-Strauss (1975) demonstrates that eating and drinking in ritual and myths provide the medium in which people express their belonging to the human race and different culinary techniques well define different social circumstances. Sharing food is a fundamental bonding ritual in which people affirm the common identity within the group to which we belong. The family gathering in *At the Height of Summer* is an example of how the family bonds are reinforced by commemorating relatives' deaths. Sharing food with the dead people is common practice in many societies such as Viet Nam, Mexico, Japan or Egypt. In real life food rituals bring people together in appreciation and companionship. However, as Jackson (1996) argues, there are societies where males and females eat separately, in these instances the meal reinforce unity of the male or female group.

Tasting the Other, Polluting the Soul.

While reinforcing cohesion, food can also be used to differentiate group identity. Food that is not familiar to a society is seen as strange, polluted and dirty, because "Our idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care of hygiene and respect for conventions." (Douglas: 2003:7) Ideas related to pollution are used to construct denigrating and xenophobic discourses about what we define as the "others". Food is used as a tool to differentiate what we understand as being normal or alien. There are numerous epithets regarding cultural groups and what they eat, and some insults are based on the premises that the "others" eat food that is ridicule, inferior, and polluted. In 2007 a British woman taking part on a TV reality show was accused of racism because the British contestant called Indian lady

'poppadom'[21]. What is considered to be edible varies from culture to culture. Italian people would find it abnormal eating fried grasshoppers, while Chinese people would find it unhygienic eating Gorgonzola.[22] Trying to taste the other, the alien, the polluted can, in fact, be seen as a sign of bravery. Francis Ford Coppola, in *Apocalypse Now*, in the scene where Willard has lunch with General Corman and Colonel Lucas clearly expresses this concept of bravery in tasting unfamiliar ingredients. During lunch is served roast beef - a typical American dish- and some fried shrimps. In the film seafood and fish are associated with the Vietmanese diet, culture and society and General Corman says to Willard:

> Roast beef, it's not too bad. Try some, Jerry, and pass it around. Um...Captain, I don't know how you feel about this shrimp but if you'll eat it, you'll never have to prove your courage again.

In this particular context Corman's quotation shows how shrimp, one of the distinct indigenous flavours of Vietnamese food, is associated, emblematically, and metaphorically, with the other, the alien, the enemy, the toxic, in this instance the Vietnamese. Indigenous culture and society arouses such intense distaste to Captain Corman that he considers American shrimp eaters to be intrepid. Assimilating the other, especially during a war, is highly dangerous. The Vietnamese do not respect the conventions of American culture and, therefore, are impure and dangerous. The novel *We're Not Here* by Tim Mahoney also perfectly exemplifies this concept of pollution and dirtiness by comparing the Vietnamese to animals, describing the women as smelling of fish and Vietnamese soldiers as "monkeys in helmets" (Mahoney: 1988: 117, cited in Christopher: 1995: 223): smelling of fish is considered foul, and labeling people as primates is derogatory in Western society. Corman's

---

[21] A poppadom is a very thin circular crisp made from a mixture of flour and water, which is fried in oil. Poppadoms are usually eaten with Indian food.

[22] Gorgonzola: a pungent blue cheese of Italian origin.

comment both disrespects Vietnamese culture and society and, at the same time, emphasizes the safety and purity of American produce, represented here by beef. Most importantly, his statement shows how the symbolic use of meat consumption is used to reinforce the notion of masculinity and incorporates American collective memory into the consumers.

Feeding the American Hero

Historically, in Western culture, meat has been associated with male superiority and power. Meat in history has been used as a tool for power and control. Hunters - predominantly male- have throughout history been in control of this economic resource. Women in non-technological societies have been subjected to this meat/male control. In hunter-gatherer societies, with the exception of the *Agta* of Luzon where females hunted deer and wild pigs using weapons (Harris: 1993:58), males were in charge of hunting and females had the chore of 'gathering' so they could look after the children and also would not be the cause of distractions while chasing animals. Hunting, due to the use of tools and strategies, is considered to be a highly skilled performance, and a preparatory activity for war. It has been even argued that hunting is one of the factors in human evolution. Meat feeds male heroes, and men's valorous actions go hand in hand with the carnivorous appetite (Jackson: 1996). In Western movies about the Viet Nam War there is a strong rhetoric of meat consumption and thereby intensification of American soldiers' identity. The following movie extract from *Apocalypse Now* (1979) offers a very good example of the association of meat eating and reinforcement of a masculinity discourse and incorporation of troops' American identity. In this scene, the area is illuminated by large cans filled with sand and jet fuel, bonfires, and the burning village in the background. There are maybe fifteen to twenty helicopters secured against the wind, in orderly patterns. Men are grouped around the fires, eating steaks, hot

dogs, hamburgers, drinking beer. It has the bizarre resemblance of some sort of barbarian beach party:

> WILLARD (V.O.): Kilgore had a pretty good day for himself. They chopped in the T-bones and the beer...and turned the L.Z. into a beach party. The more they tried to make it like home, the more they made everybody miss it

American soldiers are rewarded for their hunting and killing of the Vietnamese Communist by having a celebratory party marked through the consumption of the high quality protein of beef. Many heroes have been celebrated by consuming roasted meat in the Iliad and the Odyssey. It seems that very little has changed in honoring warriors. Steve, the main character in *Heaven and Earth* (1993), is welcome back to the USA by his mother with "*I've got steak and baked potatoes all planned, sweetie. Just like you like it.*" Meat-based celebratory feasts, however, are not only present in fictional works. During the Yugoslavian War, a group of United Nations representatives were kidnapped. When the hostages were freed, the media reported that the heroes were paid tribute by serving them a breakfast of steak, meat soup, roast veal, lamb and potatoes (Jackson: 1996:49).

Meat is very welcomed by Western male heroes, fighters, hunters. When soldiers are served food that is not entirely composed of meat, in other words food which does not feed the USA masculine identity, they feel frustrated and abandoned. Junior, in *Platoon* (1986), exemplifies this concept brilliantly: "*C'mon man, didn't I do you right that time I gave the turkey loaf for the ham and lima beans shit.*" By giving his turkey loaf to Big Arnold, Junior generously sacrifices part of his American identity to feed it to his comrade. Soldiers' carnivorous appetites are a way of incorporating and reinforcing their national identity. However, this act of generosity can also be read in other terms, or perhaps both at the same

time, illustrating the complex, multi-faceted nature of food's social meanings. Both Big Arnold and Junior are black, and one of American soul food's main ingredients is beans. Therefore, it might be that Big Arnold wants to reinforce his Creole identity by incorporating some ingredients -lima beans- belonging to his Creole heritage, while Junior wants to assert and reinforce his belonging to the United States of America by ignoring his ancestors' cultural heritage.

From these examples, it seems clear that the United States, in Americans' collective identity, is associated with the image of meat. It is not by chance that one of America's national heroes is Buffalo Bill, a buffalo and Native American slaughterer. The symbolic significance attached to meat consumption by Americans expresses superiority to others whose diet does not heavily rely on red meat, and also Americans' attachment to their home country and cultural traditions. Incorporating red meat, therefore, can be understood as incorporating Americanness and whiteness, and, thereby, a superiority to the other. For a white American, eating red meat is synonymous of masculinity; this virility is often associated with the idea of heroism. It is worth noting that humans, in the above representations of food at least, do not practice *omophagia* (the eating of raw meat): meat is always consumed processed. There are strong associations between eating raw flesh and wildness and barbarism, and in doing so breaking cultural boundaries, belonging to the animal domain. Heroes, in the archetypical imagery, refrain from barbaric primordial instincts. The weapons, the knives used in the killing of animals, and the other, are generally thought to be used by men. In common Western imagery, people would not think of a slaughterhouse as a having female workers; using rifles, guns and knives is mainly associated to the masculine red-blooded realm. This concept is clearly and elegantly illustrated by Jackson:

> The knife, [...and, I would add, weapons and tools...], essential tool for butchery, with its power of penetration and separation is a potent masculine emblem...Invariably the portion [...of meat...] the person receives depends on social rank, or on some deliberately devised egalitarian procedures. The same configuration of man, meat, approving the status is deeply embedded in Western culture (Jackson: 1996:55-56).

Food, Sexuality and Effeminacy

Interestingly the words used by Jackson (1996), such as *penetration*, have strong sexual connotations associated with the male sexual act. On the other hand, female sexuality is often metaphorically expressed by using fruit references. In *Indochine* (1992), French plantation owner Eliane Devriers, when Camille asks her about how French girls are, replies:

> It's not their color that's important. It's this! [...while eating a piece of mango]: the taste, the fruit. A child who only eats apples can't be like me. I'm Asian, a mango.

Devriers expresses her beautiful, orchidaceous appearance by comparing herself and Camille to a mango. Fruit, especially exotic varieties, convey voluptuousness and sensuality, temptation, the arousal of desire, and its fulfillment (sharing food as an exchange of bodily juices). The painting *Genesis: Papaya* is highly suggestive of women's genitalia, its colors express sensuality and the black seeds represent fertility.[23] Furthermore, *Genesis* means creation and the title given to the painting echoes the theme of procreation, and fertility. In Western art, exotic fruit has often been used as a metaphor for sexually-initiated and savage women. *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) is a good example of how fruit is a metaphor: for

[23] *Genesis: Papaya*: Gainor E. Roberts, Egg Temper on Gesso Panel , Finished with double mat and plain wood black frame, 13x15 http://www.gainor.biz/genesis series.htm

Mui's sexual development and ability to rescue the French-educated Vietnamese pianist from his Vietnamese Western-mannered fiancée. The film *Papaya: Love Goddess of the Cannibals* (1978) portrays the female character Papaya as a highly seductive, sensual and dangerous woman willing to preserve her home country's natural heritage from money-thirsty Westerners. *Indochine* (1992) presents an exotic and scented Camille who is going to become the leader of the League for Vietnamese Independence.

Using fruit as a symbol of sensuality and decadency has a long tradition. Veenker (1999-2000) shows how in Sumer, Assyrian, Babylon, and Hebrew literature, there are numerous examples of fruit used in this way. Fruit has often been used as a sexual metaphor. During the Renaissance, painters such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, used sexually suggestive shapes of fruits -especially peaches, melons and squash-to express sensuality and eroticism. In modern English slang using fruits to refer to human features is common: for instance, breasts are referred as melons, and buttocks as peaches. The work of Arcimboldo and Merisi da Caravaggio represents the sensuality and voluptuousness associated with fruit. The spilt-open pomegranates, the ripe peaches and figs carefully put on a fig leaf, the bright redness of the cherries, and the oblong and rounded shapes of the summer squashes are all highly sensorial, metaphorical, and evocative images of human sexuality, and, in particular, that of women.

Culinary femininity, in Western societies, has been associated with a lower consumption of red meat, and a diet mostly based on grains, fish and vegetables. This is, to a significant extent, similar to the diet Westerners associate with an "Oriental", or to be more precise, in this context, a Vietnamese tradition. If virility is associated with high consumption of red meat, femininity is linked with the lower consumption of animal proteins. In a popular

Western tradition it is believed that if women want to give birth to a boy they have to eat meat, fish, chocolate and salt at least six weeks before conceiving; if they wish to have a girl, they should concentrate of consuming dairy products, nuts, pulses, and grains. Some foods, such as eggs and vegetables, are believed to be effeminate in certain cultures, and their consumption is restricted to females only. On the other hand, other cosmologies have specific taboos of specific varieties of meat which can be just consumed by men (Adams: 2000). This discourse of meat-based masculinity versus effeminate meat-avoidance has been widely used in Western movies about Viet Nam in order to symbolize the feminine and unheroic nature, of the Vietnamese. Vietnamese people's lack of virility in Western films is further accentuated by the fact that this fish and rice eating population have female fighters. The Vietnamese women are portrayed as evil forces unable to face a direct fight with the enemy. *Apocalypse Now* (1979) shows a young female throwing a grenade, hidden in her straw hat, into one of Kilgore's helicopters; this imagery is highly evocative of the Viet Nam seen by the West. The absence, by this type of act, of war "fair play" makes the Vietnamese fighters, as Kilgore puts it, "Fucking savages", a comment that further underlines the Vietnamese lack of masculinity and virility by associating them with the uncultured, wild, feminine realm. The red meat-eater fighter, blatantly attacks his enemies, and does not disguise him and his intentions; he is, in a sense, more honest.

Food and the Shaping of Vietnamese Identity

Food, its consumption and the cultural traditions surrounding, it is central to the construction of identity in Vietnamese diasporic communities. As Mintz and Du Bois (2002: 99) argue, food studies have brought to light the political-economical, symbolic, and sociological processes that deal with the social construction of memory. The concept of

memory is central to Vietnamese diasporic films. One of the synesthetic ways in which Vietnamese film directors build a sense of social memory is through the consumption of food. Indeed, one can even argue that food and eating are central elements in the construction of the self. Food can be consumed in order to incorporate one's identity, to reinforce the sense of a communal identity, and to intensify the connections someone has with a particular group. However, food is not only used to express communality. This tool has also been used to differentiate the self from the rest, and to reject the association with a particular group. Analyzing how food, and the 'performing acts' surrounding it, has been socially used by the Vietnamese diaspora is a key element of understanding their cinematic output.

Fighting French Colonization with Food

Linking food practices with the formation of identities in Vietnamese communities is not a recent phenomenon. During the French colonial time the Vietnamese elite modified their "real" Vietnamese identity by shifting to a more cosmopolitan and hybridised one. A significant way in which this was achieved was through the manipulation of food, namely the hybridisation of Vietnamese and French cuisine. While this mechanism subverted the French colonial state, it was also responsible for creating tension among the Vietnamese. This process of food consumption and preparation also showed that Vietnamese cuisine, one thought as uniform, was actually regionally influenced and therefore fragmented (Peters: 2001: 21). Hybrid food, thereby, had the power to illuminate the heterogeneity of Vietnamese cultural and social practices, and undermine the idea of a unified and homogenous Vietnamese cuisine supported by the French colonial administration.

In the 1860s French officials, trying to keep the Vietnamese identities distinct from the French, found themselves failing to do so when they saw that the Vietnamese were becoming hybridly French by consuming French food. Cuisine provided an innocent and understated area where the Vietnamese elite could create a fluid identity (Peters: 2001:21-22). The Vietnamese upper class experienced hybrid identities by playing with food combinations, incorporating French elements in their traditional culture. The rigid racial and class structures imposed by the French were melted away by Franco-Vietnamese cuisine. By breaking the culinary division between the colonizer and the colonized the Vietnamese changed part of their social identity. At the same time, the Vietnamese unsettled the French State by breaking the inflexible division imposed by their colonizer. Food was used to mimic the colonizer, and to show the superiority of the Vietnamese elites over other Vietnamese. The Vietnamese elite bought French products and started using French culinary habits in their daily life. The film *Heaven and Earth (*1993), shows this point accurately when the two children of Le Ly's house master, Ahn, are made to drink milk and eat baguette while learning French language with a private tutor. This is strongly evocative of the Vietnamese elite identity becoming hybridised and getting, worryingly for some, more and more similar to the coloniser's own identity. In a similar way, there is a scene in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) which shows shows Mui serving a kind of French breakfast - to Khuyen and his girlfriend- consisting of fried eggs, baguette, bread, butter, and fruit preserve.

The appropriation of French food was used to resist the French colonial power. The colonizing power, in general, draws its force from separating itself from the aboriginal. The French did not want the Vietnamese get accustomed to the French cultural habits. Hybridity, therefore, blurred the distinction between the colonized and the colonizer; differences were the pillars that constructed the colonizers' discourse. French novels of the time such as

Mademoiselle Moustique by Eugene Jung (Peters: 2001:22) showed the cruel nature of the Vietnamese by depicting them as trying French cuisine. At the same time French newspapers reported how dangerous it was to feed the Vietnamese with French food: at the end of the day "all he (the Vietnamese cook working for a French family) needs is his rice" (Bouinais and Paulus, cited in Peters: 2001: 22). At the same time, the colonizers were not keen to sample Vietnamese food. This act would have been perceived as polluting their Frenchness. A product from what the French perceived as an unrefined and primitive civilization should not touch their palate. Vietnamese upper classes got accustomed to Western food during the French colonial era. Rich Vietnamese were invited to French official banquets, having the chance to try French food. A conspicuous number of Vietnamese imperial commissioners, in order to honour the French and to make them comfortable, and to show their understanding of French identity and the culinary practices entangled to it, prepared French dishes. A significant moment occurred in 1888 when Nguyen Huu Do gave a banquet where French and Vietnamese dishes were combined (Peters: 2001:24). By doing so the imperial high commissioner of North Viet Nam showed how Vietnamese and French cuisine can become hybridized and complementary of each other. Moreover, this act empowered Nguyen Huu Do to be able to fluently shift between a Vietnamese and French identity. By performing this act, Nguyen Huu Do 'overthrows' the colonial authority by acquiring part of its identity. In the same period, for instance, a rich Vietnamese man named Do Huu Phuong also began to serve Vietnamese dishes to his French guests. However, the rich man served French cuisine too in order for his French guests not to go hungry (Peters: 2001:24). To some extent, it seems that Du Huu Phuong tried to "pollute" his guests with Vietnamese food. On the other hand, Du Huu Phuong, by serving them French food too, gives them the chance to recapture their Frenchness and fill their stomachs. Du Huu Phuong possesses the ability of mastering both French and Vietnamese culinary traditions and identities. At the same time, we see the the

French difficulty in mastering Vietnamese cultural practices related to food, and therefore identity. Exploring this theme, the film *The Lover* (1992) portrays the character called the Chinaman (an ethnically-Chinese Vietnamese) as a Vietnamese man able to conciliate both a traditional and consumeristic identity. The Chinaman enjoys the pleasure of French sophisticated cuisine, while keeping Vietnamese-Chinese traditional values, even if only to please his family, alive. In *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), Khuyen is a Vietnamese man who enjoys some cultural and material products made popular by the French. He has himself a hybrid identity of both Vietnamese and French traditions.

In contrast, however, there was part of elite Vietnamese society that completely rejected Vietnamese traditional culinary customs and traditions. For instance, it is reported that a rich Vietnamese man called Le Phat Thanh, in organizing his daughter's wedding, chose a menu composed solely of French delicacies (Peters: 2001:25).[24] Le Phat Thanh excluded every Vietnamese culinary tradition in order to align completely with the French authority. However, Le Phat Thanh, by acting in this way, really wanted to claim his power over the French authority. The French, generally keen to denigrate the Vietnamese people mimicking them, were surprised by the refined French food with which they were served (Peters: 2001: 25). One can argue that Le Phat Thanh's disregard towards his traditional culture could have infuriated nationalist Vietnamese people. Le Phat Thanh, by completely associating himself with the French, rejected his Vietnamese identity, implicitly stating that the French culture and customs were superior to the Vietnamese ones. Indeed, Tran Te Xuong -a poet- and Nguyen Cong Hoan - the writer of *Dead End*- strongly criticised the eagerness of such rich Vietnamese to acquire a French taste. The Vietnamese elites wanting

[24] From original article in newspaper *L'Opinion* (Saigon), January 27, 1911, 2

to drink champagne and baguettes were, by this reckoning, betraying Vietnamese culture and traditions (Peters: 2001: 26).

During the French colonization of Viet Nam, the Vietnamese elite became increasingly keen to consume certain kind of culinary products. The new ingredients were initially only available to urban elites and the products which entered most easily into Vietnamese food culture were bread and beer. In the French quarters of former Saigon, bakeries were open. Bread, however, never became a staple element of a meal, and it has always been considered of secondary importance. Beer, on the other hand, became very popular with the construction of the General Beer of Indochina brewery. The Vietnamese rich, and especially their children, consumed salted butter and Maggi sauce. Biscuits and certain varieties of cakes were popular too (Krowolski and Nguyen: 1997 cited in Peters: 2001: 27). According to Peters (2001), Vietnamese parents pushed their children to join the food hybridity movement too. Pupils of the Lycee Chasseloup-Laubat, for instance, were served French breakfast. However, the Vietnamese students were never allowed to have a fully French diet at school (Peters: 2001: 26). Becoming familiar with French food was an act of appropriation of French identity, and the French did not want the Vietnamese to become *too* familiar with French culture. But at the same time the colonizers liked the willingness shown by the Vietnamese in learning about the French culinary traditions and table manners.

Some further ingredients became part of the Vietnamese elite's diet. For instance, certain vegetables unknown to the Vietnamese were introduced by the French into the colony. These plants were carrots, salad and tomatoes, and immediately become part of the Vietnamese cuisine. Furthermore, during the French colonization of Viet Nam, some French food terms became part of Vietnamese language. However, despite being presented with new

culinary ingredients, the major part of Vietnamese society never radically changed the structure of their meals, and maintained accompanying traditional Vietnamese ingredients (Peters: 2001: 27). For instance, in order to get used to the comparatively dull taste of French food, some started adding *nuoc nam* (fish sauce) to the foreign dishes. *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999) exemplifies this Vietnamese habit of pouring *nuoc nam* on food. When Thahn is invited to Harold and Dee Williams for a welcoming lunch, she adds the fish sauce to what she considers to be bland food. Vietnamese families, apart from very Westernized ones, never had French food on a daily basis. However, they did integrate some French side dishes to their main courses.

Those whose habits were becoming separated from traditional Vietnamese culture not only crossed the barriers defined by the French; they also posed a threat to traditional Vietnamese society. The Vietnamese graduated from culinary experimentation to actually seeing new ways of perceiving the world they were living in, a process which caused a counter reaction. Many Vietnamese intellectuals strongly criticized the way in which Vietnamese people were acquiring a hybrid identity and often preferring the French one over the Vietnamese. The nationalists saw these individuals as rejecting Vietnamese culture and traditions. Vietnamese 'patriots' saw hybrids as a threat to Vietnamese national identity, an identity that colonizers from various centuries, have wanted to weaken. In regard to young generations of Vietnamese, this blurred identity was seen as drastically overwhelming the sense of filial piety and authority that Vietnamese children, historically, have had for their parents. These Vietnamese youngsters had modified traditional Confucian values, which caused a back-clash among Vietnamese generations, and a strong friction between modernised and traditional culture (Peters: 2001: 27).

In the period following the First World War, French produce was no longer the domain just of the elite: the Vietnamese middle classes started to consume French produce too (Peter: 2001: 27). The Vietnamese hybridization of French food on a larger scale than before further destabilized the idea of cultural superiority ingrained into the coloniser's identity. One can say that Vietnamese people borrowed some French habits in order to subvert and become equal to the French authority governing them. The Vietnamese used French food, through incorporating and transforming it to suit their taste, as a way of asserting their own rejection of French authority. Food was, without doubt, used as a political statement: its hybridisation became one of the symbols of the struggle for empowerment of the Vietnamese people in relation to the French. It was one of the ways in which social practices were fused between the Vietnamese (starting with the elite and then extending to the middle classes) and the French colonizer. This process drastically changed, however, after the proclamation of the Socialist State of Viet Nam in 1975. As I have argued above, food has always been used as political statement. The attitude of the Vietnamese Government towards food was aimed at destroying the rich, varied and opulent Vietnamese culinary traditions that reflected the social diversity present in Vietnamese pre-Communist society.

The Vietnamese Communist Regime and Food

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam imposed what have been defined by some Vietnamese people as 'ascetic" practices upon food consumption. During the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s, street trading was scarce; the Vietnamese State had its own farms and cooperatives where food was produced and distributed. As a consequence, the bustling life of the streets was destroyed. The Vietnamese government, by controlling cities' space, and, in particular, destroying the sites of congregation, was able to control people's actions (Thomas:

1999: 47). *Tet* was the only occasion when the Vietnamese could experience the street life that they were accustomed to before the advent of the Communist regime. According to Thomas (2004: 57) the Vietnamese people after 1975 experienced a sensory deprivation. Food which, before the rise to power of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, was a daily embodiment of pleasure, became scarce and controlled by the Vietnamese State. Both the pleasure traditionally associated with food consumption and the process of identifying with food became deficient processes under the new regime. Old cultural traditions and differentiations were discarded by the Vietnamese Communist state. Duong Thu Huong's novel *Paradise of the Blind* (2002) perfectly describes this synesthetic cultural annihilation imposed by the Vietnamese Government. Hang, the book's main character, experiences this deprivation through her daily struggle to get food and consumer goods. Many of the terms used by Duong Thu Huong in this novel refer either directly or indirectly to food. She often refers to *dau phu* (bean curd), *nuoc nam* (fermented fish sauce), betel, *gung* (ginger root), *che* (sweet pudding), *doi* (blood pudding), *Tet* (Vietnamese New Year), and other Vietnamese ingredients, dishes, and events where food rituals play a central role. In the novel, she uses food symbolism and the rituals surrounding its preparation and consumption to express the alienation and identity struggle endured by the Vietnamese before the *Doi Moi* reformation:

> All we ate now was a bit of pickled white cabbage fried in a spoonful of fat. I'll never forget this dish. We cut the cabbage into tiny cylinders the size of a piece of cane sugar and then cooked it with very salty beans. To give it taste and create an illusion that we were eating a bit of meat or marinated fish, we seasoned it with a bit of grease. That winter I ate nothing else. The taste of it will probably follow me to my grave (Duong Thu Huong: 2002:179).

Food was considered to be pleasurable to the palate and therefore antagonizing the sensorial asceticism preached by the Vietnamese Government. Consuming gustative pleasure, having

sensorial experience and flashback memories of a pre-Communist Viet Nam was considered to be threatening to the communal way of living. Food belonging to Vietnamese cultural heritage was banned in order to deprive the Vietnamese of individual identity and individuality.

The importance of food consumption in the formation of individual and communal identities should not be downplayed: it is fundamental in the construction of the individual perception of one's existence. Depriving people of their food traditions is an attempt to cancel people's memory, cultural practices, and the self. The novel further illustrates this:

> "Here are some gifts for Tuan and Tu", she said, opening the hamper. Aunt Chinh immediately rushed to close the door and draw the curtains over the window. [...] My mother spread out the groceries. It was a feast for at least eight people. Her sister-in-law's eyes widened against her pale face. Her gaze was meek, vacillating. Uncle Chinh wheeled around.
>
> "This isn't necessary, really, why all this waste?" But his voice was unconvincing and toneless, directed at no one in particular[...] I could hear the clattered of dishes in the other room; no doubt the anarchy caused by the subversive, unplanned invasion of our provisions[...]
>
> She gestured to close the windows. "So they won't see." I suddenly understood why, when I bought out the gifts, she has shot me the anxious look of a shoplifter. One mouthful too many, and the others might turn you in as a potential threat to the collective (Duong Thu Huong: 2002:120).

The Vietnamese writer acknowledges the state of terror which people had to endure by illustrating how even a familial dinner had to be consumed in secrecy, when 'extravagant', and 'anti-social' food products were consumed. In cultures like the Vietnamese one, food has been a powerful expression of respect or hatred towards another human being. As in most societies, food is tangible marker of people's social status and class belonging. And that's what the Vietnamese Communist party was fighting.

During the *Doi Moi* period, the lost Vietnamese culinary past started to re-emerge. Viet Nam's cuisine started to re-emerge from women's memory. Women had to remember what food tasted liked before the advent of the Social Republic of Viet Nam Government. After the ascetic stage of Vietnamese Communism ended in 1986, there was a revival of food traditions. Wedding, funerals, and death anniversaries were celebrated by opulent banquets characteristic of the old Vietnamese traditions. Before 1986, celebrations were inevitably mostly very sober, with a limited number of people and modest spending, and the decadent and sensorial world of celebration - especially visual, gustatory- started to flourish again in Viet Nam. Old realms of cultural synesthesia were reintroduced after a period of sensorial depression. Individuality and subjectivity started to bloom, and the sense of memory was what made all of this happen. Society's structure was being sewed together by rethinking of repasts, and of course, the social and cultural practices surrounding cuisine (Ngoc: 1998).

Viet Nam has a rich culinary portfolio for both daily practices and special occasions. The gradual opening to the Western world, in terms of Appadurai's *scapes*, brought to Viet Nam new culinary products from all around the globe. Just as previously the Chinese, French and Japanese invasions brought ingredients which, in due course, became part of the Vietnamese culinary tradition, this new culinary invasion has also brought products which have now become part of the Vietnamese food realm. Vietnamese traditional food has not, however, been overwhelmed by exotic cuisines. As happened during colonial times, Vietnamese food has again become hybridized. In fact, as argued by Thomas (2004), the Vietnamese have been acquiring new ingredients such as espresso coffee and yogurt, without necessarily rushing to reject aspects of their pre-*Doi Moi* diet.

In Hanoi now there are plenty of restaurants serving *pho bo*, a pre-reformation speciality that has now become a synonym of Viet Nam. There have even been publications devoted to this dish: the book *PHO: a Speciality of Ha Noi* provides a cultural history of this dish. For instance, the book includes a section describing how an American and a Vietnamese war veteran overcame their fears and sorrows by sharing a bowl of typical dish (Ngoc: 2006: 47-57). Even the literary world has created poems and stories surrounding the magic and healing qualities of a bowl of pho bo: *Nostalgia for the Northen Pho* by Hong Le Tho is an example of this. Ngoc describes himself elsewhere as an addict to what has now become a national dish, a symbol of union after the 1986 economic reform. Whenever he goes abroad, he says, he ends up looking for this dish (Ngoc: 1998: 195). One can argue, however, than more than the taste of *pho bo*, Huu Ngoc is really looking to find a familiar theme in a strange setting. Indeed, he fails to find an authentic version because "The real *pho* can only been eaten in Viet Nam, more precisely in the North, more precisely still, in Hanoi. The dish is rightly called 'Hanoi soup'" (Huu Ngoc cited in Greeley: 2002:80). Le Hong describe himself as being possessed by the demon of *pho bo*. This is a way in which Huu reinforces his Vietnamese identity outside of his own country. The change of landscape, the sensorial familiarities lacking in foreign countries, act as a signifier of separation and distance from one's country and, at the same time, from the individual's new environment. In the case of the diasporic Vietnamese, as Thomas (2004) argues, being away from Viet Nam also signifies freedom.

On Food, Identity and Memory

Being away from Viet Nam, during the pre-reformation period gave the Vietnamese the freedom to experience Vietnamese ethnic food as a key for sensorially remembering and

experiencing their home country. The Vietnamese diaspora has used food, as the Vietnamese did during colonial times, in order to reassert their 'Vietnameseness' and mediate it with the social identity of the Western country in which they live. Food is symbolic of this identification processes. As the films show, the Vietnamese communities living outside of Viet Nam used food in order to recreate Proustian memories of their lost home country. In the case of the members of the Vietnamese diaspora unfamiliar with the "lost" Viet Nam, food is a medium which allows them to taste, smell, and imagine their ancestral land.

However, for the Vietnamese, diaspora food is not just used to nostalgically remember their lost land, where food tasted more authentically Vietnamese and the ingredients were of better quality. Certain kinds of meat- dog for example- and some types of fruit or vegetables can be only found with difficultly outside of Viet Nam. Therefore certain culinary preparations are impaired due to lack of ingredients. Most of the people of the Vietnamese diaspora think that there is no better *pho bo* than the one made in Hanoi (Ngoc: 1998). The exquisite taste of Vietnamese *pho bo* exists in the Vietnamese diaspora's collective memory of Viet Nam as much as it does in reality: "Pho inspires fond memories of home" (Greeley: 2002:80). The quest for the dish's pure, authentic aroma is really about evoking memories of Viet Nam in the Vietnamese expatriates' community. It has been argued that homesickness takes pragmatic shapes involving the desire of familiar foods and smell. It is for this reason that, in gift exchange among the Vietnamese diaspora and their relatives living in Viet Nam, the expatriates desire "traditional" gifts (Thomas:1999). Gifts given to the relatives living outside of Viet Nam include tea, bean cakes, painting depicting water buffalos and women wearing conical straw hats. One can argue that the Vietnamese diaspora think of an oneiric Viet Nam outside of history and time. As argued by Thomas

(1999: 156), the Vietnamese diaspora long for Vietnamese local, and therefore "authentic", goods, in order to reinforce their nostalgia for the past. Thomas quotes Trinh T. Minh-Ha:

> Differences between homeland and diaspora tend to be taken for granted; they often are naturalized and homogenized. The homeland becomes an illusory secure and fixed place, invokes as a natural state of things untainted by any process or outside influence (Trinh T. Minh-Ha cited in Thomas: 1999: 157).

To some extent, one can argue that the Vietnamese diaspora imagines a pre-colonial Viet Nam with nostalgic, romantic and exotic feelings. The same feeling is shared by the French regarding their former colonies. At the same time, the Vietnamese diaspora is aware of the colonial and post colonial history of Viet Nam. The Vietnamese expatriates escaped from the harsh and oppressive regime imposed by the French, American, and then the Vietnamese Communist party. They are aware of the suffering experienced by their relatives living in Viet Nam. Evoking Viet Nam through food consumption is a safe way to remember Viet Nam that outside of Viet Nam does not cause any friction:

> During the war we were so together, living and dying together. There was no sense of separation. But in America our ambitions, our dreams, or sadness were particular and different from one other. And, in fact, we became isolated from one other (Andrew Lam: 2007).

The isolation that the Vietnamese experienced upon their arrival in the host countries has been mitigated by the cultural and social practices associated with food and its consumption. Wanting to consume Vietnamese food was the force that helped the Vietnamese building little Saigon. Indeed, it seems justified to state more generally that when new immigrants are settling in a country, one of the first types of business to appear are food shops. For instance, after the Polish started to arrive in the United Kingdom, the demand for Polish food, and sites

for consuming it, rose. New sites for consuming it have been created, and British supermarkets have started stocking Polish produce. This process, in a different historical period, can be identified, for instance, in Italian communities in the USA and UK. The same processes also occurred with the Vietnamese diaspora.

Until 1986, remembering Viet Nam through food practices was a mark of difference and rebellion, between the diaspora and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam Government. Whereas the Vietnamese where denied subjectivity, the Vietnamese diaspora, was allowed to build and express it, at least, within the families and their circle of friends through consumption. Old Confucian traditions, especially the ones dealing with consumption had survived outside Viet Nam when they were temporarily rejected by authority within Viet Nam. These traditions have helped the Vietnamese diaspora in bonding together - the celebration of *Tet* outside Viet Nam, for instance, unites the Vietnamese diasporas- and celebrating their country of origin, pre-colonial customs and culture.

Mary Douglas (1971) from an ethnic point of view, Bourdieu (1982) from a class point of view, and Caplan (1997) from a social genre point of view, all argue that food is a boundary maker. Food has embedded the symbolic ability to transform the outside world into an inside one. Eating *pho bo* is, for Vietnamese, a powerful symbol that enables its consumer to absorb Vietnameseness in much the same way that eating hamburgers is traditionally a mark of American identity. Diasporic food is especially about creating and maintaining an identity. Food, more generally, is not only about assimilating the self, but also assimilates the others. Tasting a foreign dish, as with the case of the American veteran tasting *pho bo*, has been shown to be about tasting the others. Tasting the "Other" means, in effect, accepting that they are not poisoned, polluted, and, therefore, not really so strange. Food cannot just be

merely confined to the structure of what is considered categories of the pure and polluted (Mary Douglas based her work on such divisions). However, food has to be considered in everyday life practices as a tool that enables the reading of social practices. Food has the capability of generating subjective explanations and being responsible for producing potent meanings. As Sutton (2001: 15) argued, this is also what ties food to the topic of memory. It has been long argued that memory, like food, has been a pillar in the formation and expression of identity: "the royal road to the unconscious" (Hesser: 2008: II). Many authors and artists have explored this subject because food is evocative of certain memories, of a particular instant, of a Proustian moment.

In diasporic identities, it has been shown how issues surrounding nostalgia have been linked with food. Memory is not merely linked to visual material. Sutton pointed out how other types of memory can be found "sedimented in the body", in what Bourdieu (1982) similarly called "body hexis" or "the work of culture through time on posture, gesture and other bodily practices" (Sutton: 2001: 12). In the case of the Vietnamese diaspora and its films, bodily experiences of food have been translated into visual culture in order to have a synesthetic experience of the cinematic product. The Vietnamese diaspora eat pho bo and drink sugar cane juice in order to remember. The Vietnamese diasporic filmmakers represent Vietnamese traditional food and choose to represent Vietnamese cuisine in their films in order to remember and celebrate Vietnamese Confucian culture. These filmmakers' generations have been removed from the turmoil of the Vietnamese-American conflict. However, they are still struggling with their relationship with Viet Nam. Their fragmented identity, part Vietnamese and part Western, is reflected in the Vietnamese diaspora's gestures and bodily practices.

In the Australian Vietnamese communities, for instance, most young people of Vietnamese background consider themselves Australians (Thomas: 2004). In order to get an Australian identity, they embody certain practices such as: dressing in a very casual fashion, and eating what they consider Australian food such as meat pies, steaks, and lamb. However, Australian food is mostly eaten outside of home whereas Vietnamese food is consumed in a familiar context. Eating ethnic food makes diasporic people feel at home in their host country. Consuming meals within the household still holds a strong symbolic connotation for the young Vietnamese: that's where they assimilate their Vietnamese identity. On the other hand, consuming food outside their home allows them to differentiate themselves from their parents. At the same time the non-familial consumption of food allows the young diasporic Vietnamese to build social networks outside of their families. Dining in fast food outlets allow the young diasporic Vietnamese to experience the "wider world" and they become homogenized. By consuming "global" food the young diasporic Vietnamese perceive themselves as being less Vietnamese and more cosmopolitan. The homogenized world of the fast food allows young diasporic Vietnamese to purify themselves from their Vietnameseness. Consuming burgers, chips, and milkshake washes them from their cultural background. As Thomas (2004) pointed out, fast foods jobs are also the first jobs Vietnamese migrants get when arriving in the Western nations. Therefore, the fast food site becomes the space where Vietnamese want to experience the other and perhaps, thereby 'find themselves'. Fast food is the often the first contact than young diasporic Vietnamese have of the outer world. However, despite this will to experience the other Vietnamese people often end up bonding with groups of Asian background (Butcher and Thomas cited in Thomas:2004). The young diasporic Vietnamese do not reject their traditional ethnic food. They associate it with their old cultural values and their ancestral country. On the other hand, fast food allows the young diasporic Vietnamese to mediate their identity, to hybridize themselves.

As the Vietnamese incorporated some French culinary practices in their diet to become more French, and have an equal status as their colonizer, so the Vietnamese diaspora has adopted some culinary tradition of their host country in order to become more American, Australian, Canadian or French. However, what the Vietnamese diaspora is actually looking for is its identity. Food is a constituted part of the bodily practices and therefore can be considered as an indicator of Vietnamese diaspora identity. Examining the way in which food is consumed and in which food is eaten is a tangible expression of the collective identity of the Vietnamese diaspora. This concept of the quest for identity is clearly expressed by Andrew Lam:

> In fact I had no place in the America's imagination when I first came to the United States in 1975. And that was also the cause of my frustrations for years. And perhaps it is also the reason why I write. It's to explain what happened from the point of view of someone who was forced out of his homeland and had to readjust to a new way of life (Lam:2007).

This sense of isolation felt by Lam has been widely shared by the Vietnamese, especially the first generation of Vietnamese, living outside of their homeland. The cultural adjustments the Vietnamese had to undergo when they left their ancestral land meant that they had no choice other than to modify their identities. They abandoned Viet Nam because of their rejection of the values imposed by the Communist regime. At the same time the diasporic Vietnamese had to adapt to countries whose cultures' and values were, in some respects at least, almost the opposite of Vietnamese Confucian ones. Therefore they had to deconstruct, reconstruct, and mediate their perception of the self. They were no longer considered Vietnamese by their national social group. The Vietnamese people often refer to their expatriates by the pejorative term of *Viet Kieu* (Vietnamese sojourner) whereas the diasporic Vietnamese refer to themselves as *Nguoi Viet Hai Ngoai* (Overseas Vietnamese) or, albeit quite rarely, as

Nguoi Viet Tu Do (Free Vietnamese). At the same time they were not perceived as being America, Australian, Canadian, or French. The Vietnamese diaspora, essentially, has had a double identity that has not allowed them to feel fully accepted in either realm of these subjectivities:

> The twentysomething generation of Vietnamese Americans find ourselves straddling the cultual fence. Being culturally "mixed"can be heart-wrenching at times; we all have disagreements with our parents because they think we are not "Vietnamese" enough, and we feel they are too "traditional", on the wrong continent or obscenely anachronistic. But straddling the fence does have it advantages, one of which is allowing us to "see both sides." All of us, whether we are conscious of it or not, have come to embrace a heterogeneous cultural identity, and this hybridization distances us from the strict polarities of "Vietnamese" and "American" cultures" (Khoi Truong Luu :1993: 322-323).

Khoi (1993) makes the reader aware of the generational frictions between the older Vietnamese and their offspring. As narrated by Khoi Troung Luu, the young Vietnamese are stuck between the familial need of becoming more Vietnamese and the outside pressure pressuring them to become more homogeneous towards American, or more generally, Western culture. Sensorially, when the diasporic Vietnamese first came to Western countries, they still perceived the smells and sounds of Viet Nam. As Lam said, his first American home was his aunt's house that smelled of fish sauce and incense (two typical odours associated with Viet Nam), and the sound of his aunt's house was the sound of his grandmother's prayer. These sensorial realities were far removed from common American ones. The first generation of Vietnamese living outside of Viet Nam had a sensorial realm too close to the Vietnamese one to be digested by their host countries. Consequently, they kept their ethnic practices, such as the consumption of Vietnamese food, confined to their own houses or their own cultural sites. When a more confident Vietnamese community started opening up their

sensorial realm to the world, by opening restaurants, and having their cultural traditions displayed to a Western audience, they started to become socially and culturally blended into Western society. The overseas Vietnamese started to become integral part of the cities where their diaspora was settling. In fact, it could be said that they changed the structure of cities by creating places such as Little Saigon.

VI

Literature Review

There is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a very limited literature directly relating to Vietnamese diasporic film. This thesis can be seen, therefore, as bringing some new insight into an under-researched area. As such, it is, of course, informed by works on diasporic identity, film theory, food as symbolism and as memory, and other theoretical ideas, particularly in post-colonial studies. This thesis' use of key theoretical work takes scholarly work on diasporic cinema in a new direction by applying paradigms in a manner which has not previously been attempted. This section demonstrates how the current work adds to the body of knowledge on the Vietnamese diaspora, and, particularly, how these key theoretical texts can be applied to offer further illumination on Vietnamese diasporic cinema.

Vietnamese Diasporic Cinema

In terms of work directly on this subject, the only existing work is by Blum-Reid (2003) and Tarr (2005), which, in both cases, concentrates on the French-Vietnamese diaspora. Blum-Reid (2003) has offered an analysis of how Tran Anh Hung, in his main feature films, and Lam Le in his short cinematic productions, reassert their Vietnameseness. This author provides an important analysis of the work of Tran Anh-Hung and Lam Le. As she argues, in analyzing such film, it is of fundamental importance to situate the cinematographic text in an historical framework. However, she, unfortunately, does not analyze Tran Anh Hung's short films in a manner that comments directly upon the theme of the war and displacement undergone by the Vietnamese diaspora, which forms a critical part of their twentieth century historical experience. Blum-Reid (2003) does offer discussion on

identity and on how having a hybrid identity means keeping translating from a culture to another. However, the prevalence of the theme of war and displacement in the cinematic works strongly suggests that is an essential part of diasporic identity, and thus merits further discussion. Blum-Reid (2003) argues that Vietnamese can better access the work of the Vietnamese diasporic film directors because they are the best interpreters of the gestures and accents presented in the French-Vietnamese films. Yet, it is also true that a non-hybrid film can pose the same problematic, even if interpreted by someone of the same ethnicity as the film director, and, therefore, this cannot be seen as a problem of diasporic cinema *per se*.

Tarr (2005) has made a significant contribution to understanding the films of Tran Anh Hung by concentrating on the fragmentation expressed by the French-Vietnamese film director and the multisensorial experiences provided by his films. As discussed in the methodology section above, this thesis considers Tran Anh Hung as an author; Tarr (2005) also argues that the film director can be considered as such, but neglects the socio-historical realities of his displacement. I argue that such realities are in fact present, even if not immediately evident, in Tran Anh Hung's films. Furthermore, although Tarr maintains that Tran Anh Hung does not engage with social-realism and is, rather, concerned primarily with the perfection of each shot, I contend that this is not, in fact, the case. For instance, in *Cyclo* (1995), the director clearly uses a neo-realist, a typical filmic style that engages with the social-realism of Ho Chi Minh City.

Other Vietnamese Diasporic Writing

In terms of non-film focused writings on the Vietnamese diaspora, *Two Rivers: New Vietnamese Writing from America and Viet Nam* (2002) offers a useful account of the

displacement experiences the Vietnamese diasporic writing had in their home-seeking journey and during their life in the United States. Similar themes are explored by the collection of essays and poetries *Once upon a Dream: the Vietnamese American Experience* (1995). The writings in the book focus upon the displacement undergone by the Vietnamese-American diaspora, and the problems related to the liminality of the Vietnamese-American identity. *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Fight and New Beginnings* (2006) is about the home-seeking journey, displacement, fragmentation, and adaptation to a foreign culture the Vietnamese faced during and after the American-Vietnamese conflict. Australian-Vietnamese writer Nam Le (2008) also, *inter alia*, explores his Vietnamese identity in his recent fictional work *The Boat*. Of particular note is Andrew Lam (2005), who has provided an important contribution to understanding diasporic identity. His writings constitute a substantial analysis of the home-seeking journey, displacement, generational gap, and construction of identity the Vietnamese-American diaspora experienced in the United States.

Such works form a pillar of this thesis because they are written accounts of the displacement felt by the Vietnamese diaspora, especially the Vietnamese-American one, and they also describe the same process of fragmentation of identity and displacement that the Vietnamese film directors explore in their work. Such writings can, in many cases, be described as primary sources of the Vietnamese diasporic experience. Such accounts also strongly indicate that diasporic films are not merely fictive works but they are expressions of the diasporic experience of the Vietnamese diaspora.

Key Theoretical Texts

Naficy (2001) offers an approach that is, in some ways, essential for analyzing diasporic film. As such, it is a key theoretical work for the present thesis. First of all, he coins the term 'accented cinema' meaning the films made by filmmakers *originally* coming from the Third World or those who have a diasporic relationship with it, even if born or brought up in the West. The movies made by French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American film directors have as a common thematic the idea of displacement and exilic journey. Naficy's (2001) analysis of accented films enables an analysis of diasporic filmic productions which cuts across gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, national cinema, genres and authorship. Naficy (2001) goes against the trend of postmodernist analysis of films which claims that the author is 'dead' and, therefore, is not part of the filmic texts. In contrast, he argues that the author is inscribed in the filmic text, and Vietnamese diasporic movies are autobiographical accounts of the authors' experiences of displacement. The films of the Vietnamese diaspora, as Naficy (2001) argues, share stylistic tendencies such as use of voice, sound and language, textual reference to the lost homeland as a master referent, visual representation of the traumatic split relations with the body, and subjective and hybrid identities. The parameters he uses in analyzing diasporic film are highly appropriate for evaluating the cinematic productions of the French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American diaspora. Furthermore, in the filmic analysis proposed in this thesis, great importance has been placed upon the visual style Naficy (2001) uses as a tool in analyzing accented films, especially on the fetishized objects and icons of the homeland and the past. However, it should be added that the tools proposed by the author in analyzing accented films, do, despite recognizing the differences between exile and diaspora, use a universalizing methodology with a particular conceptual framework. Naficy (2001) argues that the differing cultural experiences of film makers

connected to different countries mean they produce very different films, and yet, at the same time, he maintains that it is possible to generalize and share displacement and deterritorialization experiences. Indeed, in the case of the Vietnamese diaspora it is necessary to *distinguish* between the products of the French-Vietnamese and the Vietnamese-American because their products, despite having certain communal features, do also significantly differ from each other.

Marks' (2000) theory on films made by diasporic migrants and indigenous people living in the West, has also strongly informed this work. She uses haptic visualities to create a physical sense of place for creating a sense of place. This work is essential to analyzing Vietnamese diasporic cinematic productions because of their sensorial nature expressed through the use of traditional Vietnamese food and objects. Marks (2000) demonstrates how diasporic communities, through the memory of the sense, smell, taste, and bodily presence of their homes and cultures, recreate a physical sense of place. Through the senses, she articulates the epistemological significance of how modes of sensations are signs of how tmemory and cultural knowledge is embedded in media images. A focus of this research is how intercultural cinema engages with the non-audiovisual senses of the body. She argues that haptic images evoke a sense of touch, which stimulates a bodily response rather than permitting only a psychoanalytic identification She further shows that, in diasporic cinema, the use of cultural sensorium has a central role in involving proximal senses, such as touch, smell, and taste. The synesthetic approach to visuality is, on a significant level, found in diasporic Vietnamese film, where the cultural memories of the sense are often the only resources the diasporic Vietnamese filmmakers have to access traditional Viet Nam and traditional Vietnameseness. The current work pays special attention to how, in terms of

expressing identity, food is symbolically used to convey bodily sensations, rather than only identification, through the viewer.

Despite diasporic films being, to some degree, carriers of Western ideology, they also act as symbols of the counter narrative to Western globalizing culture. Key to understanding the process through which diasporic identity is formed is the work of Appadurai (2003) who, in his postcolonial cultural theory exemplifies how new technologies- with cinema being a key expression of such technologies- allow the diasporic public sphere to create counter national narratives of identity. The counter narratives constructed by diasporic Vietnamese film directors are an example of how new technologies can be used by the diaspora to create public spaces where counter narratives of identity are created.

In terms of Post-Colonial Studies, Said (2003), particularly, provides the theoretical framework that articulates the Western notion of the Orient. Said's insight is a fundamental tool for analyzing the manner in which the Western media- including film makers- have portrayed the Vietnamese. His work shows how Western attitudes toward the East are projections of false Western assumptions toward Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The West has a long tradition of romanticizing images of the East, part of the reason for which has been to justify European and American colonial ambitions. The concept of Orientalism, in relation to France and its colonies, has been analyzed by Norindr (1996) who argued that Indochina is fictively and phantasmatically constructed upon a legacy of French colonialism in South East Asia. The scholar argues that French construction of the imaginary Indochina is strongly informed by the fantasy, desire and nostalgia constituent of the French colonial invasion of Indochina. This notion is important for this thesis' argument: it demonstrates that phantasmatic fantasies have become part of the French-Vietnamese film directors in the way

they describe Viet Nam and the Vietnamese. Moreover, it also shows how French-Vietnamese film directors have become part of the French political ideology which portrays France's former colonies in such exotic terms.

Film Studies

Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place (1998) is informative of how the interdisciplinary study of the media- including film- shapes identities and culture in the globalized world. Bhabha, Gabriel, Morley and Shohat are contributors to Naficy's (1998) edited book. The main focus of such essays is the idea of home and homeland in a postmodern culture. However, this thesis rejects the postmodernist style of film analysis also articulated, particularly, by Jameson (1991) because it celebrates the death of *the author* who, as discussed above, is central to this thesis' analysis of identity in diaporic cinema. *Rethinking Third Cinema* (2003) is an anthology that groups the most important essays written establishing and addressing the notion of Third cinema theory, practices of developing and postcolonial nations. An understanding of Third cinema is essential to an understanding that diasporic products cannot, in reality, be considered to be specifically part of this category because the film directors primarily work in a Western context.

Food in Cinema

Food in Film: A Culinary Performance of Communication (2003) acknowledges the relevant, and until recently neglected, role of food in film studies. It analyzes how the material and symbolic representation of food in films constructs meanings and shows and alters social relationships. The author, in her analysis of food in film, uses an interdisciplinary

field of work crossing from film studies, to semiotics, to social anthropology. As such, it informs the idea of the centrality of food to identity in this work. *Reel of Food* (2004), edited by Anne Bower, is a collection of essays by some of the major food studies scholars, such as Counihan and Ashkenazi, which explores how food, in intercultural European and Hollywood cinema, is used to convey issues related, *inter alia*, to racial ethnic identities, and gender and sexual politics. Such texts have had a profound impact on the understanding of how food is symbolic of identity and social structure in film analysis. Without the contributions of Ferry and Bower, this research would have been deprived of a pivotal idea.

The synesthetic experience of food in films is explored in Keller's (2006) study on food, film and culture. The author, and the current work, both claim that culinary imagery is central in making the audience experience the film. The current work also analyzes how food, in diasporic films, is used as a reminder of the Vietnamese diaspora's past and memory. The work of Krosmeyer (1999) and Synnot (1991) are essential for understanding why food in cinema studies was mostly ignored until the 1990s. These works show how this has been the case primarily because Western philosophy has, historically, categorized the sensorial realm of smell, touch, and taste as inferior both to sight and hearing and also, more particularly, to reason. Furthermore, Krosmeyer (1999) looks at the different meanings which food and drink convey in both art and literature and as well in ordinary human life.

Food: Symbolism and Memory

Food carries symbols that, as argued by Jackson (1996) are part of both the conscious and the unconscious realms. The symbolism attached to food, such as the rejection the American soldiers generally showed towards Vietnamese food in American films on Viet

Nam, is so much part of daily cultural practice that the symbolism attached to it is often forgotten. Jackson (1996) demonstrates how food carries deep symbolic meanings. This study is fundamental to appreciating the importance of food in constructing an identity. Sutton (2001) offers an in depth study on how this process works, looking at the centrality of food in constructing Kalymnian historical consciousness in Greece. The author convincingly argues that food is used to embody and consume Kalymnian identity. Through the use of food, the Vietnamese diaspora have incorporated, modified, and sometimes rejected their ancestral ties. Insight to understanding the eating symbolism and patterns of the Vietnamese diaspora has been given by Thomas (2004) which elucidates how Vietnamese-Australian reinforce or reject their Vietnamese identity, in a non-homely space, through food consumption. Ideas on food and memory have been further shaped by the *Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2000*, edited by Walker (2001). This collection of essays offers insight into the strong connections existing between food, memory and identity. Also of note is Peter (2001) who exemplifies how food has been used as a cross-cultural tool for the Vietnamese in acquiring the colonizers' identity and becoming culturally hybrid.

VII

Identity in French-Vietnamese Film

This chapter analyzes the films of French-Vietnamese film directors Tran Anh Hung and Lam Le. Specifically, the films analyzed are those which are available on DVD or VHS, and therefore easily accessible to the general public. The chapter has been sub-divided into two main sections, each of which looks at the films of a specific director. The film analysis pays attention to five main elements: how the Vietnamese film director affirms/reinforces/denies/reflects upon his diasporic Vietnamese identity; the role of the family in Vietnamese diasporic films; the symbolic function of food; the use of objects in recreating Viet Nam and reinforcing the film director's diasporic identity; the representation of the Vietnamese body.

The chapter starts by looking at the career of Tran Hang Hung, whose first feature was released in 1987. The Vietnamese diasporic film director's first short film is *The Married Woman of Xuong Nam* (1987), which was followed by *The Lady of Stone* (1991). These short films are both adapted from Vietnamese myths: *Thieu phu Nam Xuong* (The Married Woman of Nam Xuong) and *Hon Vong Phu* (The Waiting Stone). The main theme of Tran Anh Hung's short films is the impact of war on the Vietnamese people, especially in terms of familial unity. Both movies were shot in France, but *The Married Woman of Xuong Nam* (1987) is set in Viet Nam. Tran Anh Hung's first feature film *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) was shot in Paris but set in Viet Nam during the 1960s. The film revolves around a Vietnamese woman's passage from childhood to womanhood. This woman, Mui, incarnates the virtuous nature of the traditional Vietnamese woman defending traditional Vietnamese culture over the one imposed by the colonizer. *Cyclo* (1995) and *At the Height of Summer*

(2000) were Tran Anh Hung's next films. Both of these were shot in, and are set in, contemporary Viet Nam. The former is set in Ho Chi Minh City, while *At the Height of Summer* (2000) takes place in Hanoi. *Cyclo* (1995) explores the impact of rapacious capitalism on the poorest Vietnamese classes, especially in terms of family fragmentation. *At the Height of Summer* (2000) is also about family disintegration and the stresses caused by trying to adhere to traditional Vietnamese Confucian principles in a rapidly changing society.

Despite- or perhaps because of- Lam Le having been the first member of the diasporic Vietnamese community to make films, his productions are, unfortunately, not readily available. Lam Le's earliest cinematic productions, the short films *Recontre des Nuages et du Dragon* (1981) and *Poussiere d'Empire* (1983), have not been made available on video/DVD, and therefore are not included in this thesis. Contact was also made with various scholars with the aim of borrowing personal copies. These attempts were unfortunately unsuccessful as none of those contacted possessed their own copies of these titles. While it is sometimes possible to watch these earlier cinematic productions at the *Cinémathèque Française* in Paris, my film analysis method requires multiple viewings of all films discussed in this paper, which has therefore precluded me from discussing these earlier productions.

However, Lam Le's latest film *20 Nights* (2005) has been included because it has had a (limited) distribution: in Europe, it has only been released in the Italian market. The second part of the chapter is, therefore, dedicated to the analysis of this film, which is set in France and Java. It narrates the fragmented identity of a German-French woman living in Indonesia, and a French-Vietnamese man who lives in Paris. They both live away from their home country, and both believe that living far away from their country of origin will allow them to forget about their ancestral cultural values and disconnect from family traditions.

Tran Anh Hung

Tran Anh Hung was born in Da Nang, central Viet Nam. At the age of 12, following the fall of Saigon, he and his family emigrated to France. He is married to Tran Nu Yen Khe, an actress who features as a major female character in all his short movies and feature films. He initially studied philosophy; later after watching *Poussiere d'Empire* (1983), he dedicated his studies to cinema, reading cinematography at the Louis Lumiere School in Paris (Tarr: 2005). Director Lam Le was Tran Anh Hung's mentor, and also worked as an actor in Tran Anh Hung's *The Married Woman of Xuong Nam* (1987) and *The Lady of Stone* (1991). These earlier short films were produced in an 'artisanal' fashion, typical of what Naficy (2001) defines as diasporic cinema. The cast of Tran Anh Hung's short films have been constituted by non-professional actors. Tran Anh Hung's feature films have won various prizes and have been internationally recognized. *The Scent of Green Papaya* (2000) was shot in France and made in an artisanal manner; the actors were non professional, except for Anh Hoa Nguyen. *Cyclo* (1995) was shot in Ho Chi Minh City with an international crew; all the actors were professional apart from the character of Cyclo himself. *At the Height of Summer* (2000) was shot in Saigon, the actors were professional; and were Vietnamese, or of Vietnamese ancestry. Tran Anh Hung was once asked if his film At the Height of Summer (2000) was more a French or Vietnamese film. The answer he gave indicates that he is a product of cosmopolitan culture:

> Phipps: You were born in Viet Nam but were educated in France. Where would you say is the balance between Viet Nam and France in this film?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: I think it is difficult to respond to this question. Clearly, I am formed by the situation of my life. I've spent the longest part of my life in France. But the question of whether the film is more French or Vietnamese, it's not a good question. What interests me when I make films -what makes the

> specificity of my films- is that because I live in France, all the products of the rest of the world are accessible. I love American painting, I love German music, I love Japanese cinema and literature, I love Vietnamese contemporary literature and painting, I love Italian cuisine. Therefore I'm made up of all this, and my films reflect this more than the question of whether the film is more Vietnamese or French. Clearly, because the film takes place in Viet Nam, it's important that I think deeply about what is Viet Nam. And I did that, because if you ask, "Do I feel Vietnamese", I'd say. "Yes, I feel deeply Vietnamese" (Phipps: 2001).

Tran Anh Hung's hybrid identity is expressed throughout his body of work through the tensions between traditional and modern Vietnamese culture as reflected in his portrayal of family life.

La Femme Mariée de Nam Xuong (The Married Woman of Nam Xuong) (1987)

The Married Woman of Nam Xuong was the first short film made by director Tran Anh Hung when he was still a student at *the Ecole Nationale Supérieure Louis Lumière*. The film was produced and financed by the school and the actors are non-professional. Future professional actress and wife of Tran Anh Hung, Tran Nu Yên-Khê, is the female character of the film. Lam Le, French-Vietnamese film director and Tran Anh Hung's mentor, also appears in the film. Unfortunately, there is no public record of the critical reception, no doubt related to the fact that there is no record of the film having a cinematic release. Nonetheless, the film was, in spite of this, nominated for the Short Film *Palme d'Or* at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival, suggesting that some film critics, at least, must have highly rated Tran Anh Hung's film. Certainly, it can be argued that, due to its style and plot, the film was made for an 'art-house' audience.

The film is based upon traditional Vietnamese folk tale *Thieu phu Nam Xuong* (Young Married woman in Nam Xuong) written by Nguyen-Du in the sixteenth century. The story concerns a pregnant woman whose spouse goes to fight the war against the Champa. During the three years he is at war, the woman tells her child that the shadow he sees at night is his father. When the woman's husband returns from the war, the son says that he cannot be his father because he only comes at night. The woman's husband thinks his wife must have been unfaithful to him; to save her dignity, she commits suicide. In Tran Anh Hung's short film, the setting is moved to the time of the Viet Nam conflict.

The visual style of *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) is slow-paced, driven by actions rather than words. The dialogues are very short, in the Vietnamese language, and

without subtitles, between the woman of Nam Xuong and her child, and between the father and his baby boy. However, no words at all are spoken until the second part of the short film, and the two main characters never interact with each other using words. The parsimony concerning dialogue and the non-ability, for non Vietnamese speakers, of understanding the dialogue can be seen as authorial statements. First of all Tran Anh Hung by shooting the short film in the Vietnamese language suggests that this is a story whose narrative can be easily understood by viewers. At the same time, according to Naficy (2001), one of the major losses of diasporic identity concerns the disappearance of their ethnic language. The diasporic film directors by using their ancestral language are therefore reinforcing their individual identity but also their national and regional ones[25]. However, if the film viewer is not fluent in the language in which the film is spoken, he/she cannot easily appreciate the regional linguistic differences. It can be said that Tran Anh Hung is more interested in the stylistic representation of the film rather than its narrative plot. In *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) visual signs become more important than verbal language. The setting of the films is punctiliously studied and has almost pictorial qualities.

The *mise-en-scene* of *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) actually takes place in a French studio. The film was not shot on location in Viet Nam. Despite the fact that the house looks 'Asian', its space, order, and cleanliness would equally remind a Western audience of a traditional Japanese house. One can say that this confusion is caused by the limited experience the average Western viewer has of Vietnamese traditional houses' architecture. Indeed, the emptiness of the house, and meticulous placement of objects, recalls the stylistic *mise-en-scene* used by Japanese director Ozu in his films.[26] Tran Anh Hung uses low key lighting to give *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) a realist effect.

25 Regional identity, as indicated by different accents and dialects.

[26] Ozu is a Japanese film director. In a similar manner to Tran Anh Hung, 'the family' is a central theme of his work. Like Tran Anh Hung, Ozu expresses nostalgia for 'traditional' society/customs.

Furthermore, he borrows from the Japanese director an elliptical narrative style and both give importance to objects having symbolic function which are consequently shot in a highly aesthetic style. As Richie (1977) comments on Ozu, so it is also true of Tran Anh Hung: that they invite the viewer to make inferences and deductions based on the everyday actions performed by the characters. The French-Vietnamese director, by using these narrative and cinematographic techniques, enables the spectator to experience Vietnam in synesthetic ways.

The film is set in a house with one room only. The bedroom and the kitchen are in the same room. The camera does not move from the house. The spectator is only allowed to see what is taking place in the room. The audience is not even allowed to have a view of the outside world from the house windows or door. However, the film does not give the audience a sense of claustrophobia. The audience feel voyeuristically attracted to the setting, to the structural beauty of the house. The viewer does not receive any motivation for which she/he has the need to look outside of the domestic space. This disinterest for the external world is ensured by the way in which Tran Anh Hung's shots are meticulously composed, with prominently-placed objects such as offering bowls and other domestic implements adorning the frame, and which are noticed with interest by the audience. These are useful props necessary in developing narrative, and they also have the aesthetic beauty that anchors the audience's eyes onto the set.

The film starts with an image of a back wall where a thin column of smoke burns away. The viewer is not aware of what it is burning and why. However, due to the extradiegetic music -Vietnamese traditional music[27]- giving the shot a sad feeling, the viewer imagines that the smoked is caused by burning incense sticks. This shot is anticipating the

[27] Truong Tang was a diasporic Vietnamese composer of classic Vietnamese music.

death of the woman of Nam Xuong too. In Vietnamese households incense sticks are burnt on dead people's altar as a sign of respect, and a mean to free their souls so they can depart from this world.

Following the main titles, the film opens up by showing consumed incense sticks placed in a bowl full of rice, in a type of pottery that because of its style and design can be identified as Vietnamese. Next to it there is a smaller ceramic recipient containing water. The two containers are placed on a shelf that seems to be the house's shrine[28]. One realizes that the woman of Nam Xuong is poor by the simple altar she has in her house, consisting only of a bare piece of wood. Richer families use valuable pieces of furniture as altars, made of hand carved wood, red and gold painted, and on which there are arranged copper candlesticks and silver pans. To frame the shrine and the pans, Tran Anh Hung uses a close shot that indicates the importance the film director give to this objects. One can read it as a way in which the film director pays homage to his ancestral land and his dead relatives[29]. Moreover, it can be also argued that having a close-up of the offering as first shot means that someone in the house is praying for something. As the viewer later discovers, the lady of Nam Xuong is praying that her husband will be safe and able to come back from the war. The objects shown in the shot are symbolic of Viet Nam. Indeed, they have the symbolic function of representing Viet Nam in Tran Anh Hung's film. These traditional Vietnamese objects have the function of evoking Viet Nam and its tradition.

[28] Having a shrine in the house it is a typical Vietnamese tradition. Placing fresh offering and burning incense on shrines have been part of Vietnamese Confucian cultural tradition for centuries.

[29] The cult of the ancestors is accompanied by a certain number of beliefs and practices, some of them deriving from Confucian teachings, and others originating from popular superstitions and Taoist rites. Many people, whether scholars or common folk believe that the souls of their ancestors are the natural protectors of the family line. It is to the latter to whom prayers are addressed, imploring, for example, the curing of a sick child. Their influence, and the sum of good actions they accomplished in the lifetimes, are also used to explain success in business, in examinations, and all other fortunate developments.

In the ensuing scenes, Tran Anh Hung presents the main characters of the film: the woman of Nam Xuong's son, herself, and her husband. There is no dialogue between the three. The only sounds the audience can hear are the diegetic noises coming from the husband's carving of a wooden stick and the noises the woman of Nam Xuong makes while cleaning the house. There is a close-up of the woman throwing away the old offering on the house stove, and a very significant shot that shows spouse and wife placing new offerings on the shrine. In the meantime, we notice that in the house there is a man waiting for the woman's husband to go to fight the war. Before leaving, the husband puts on his child one of his used shirts. Through the use of the shirt Tran Anh Hung is giving the impression that the father will go away for long time. The only sensorial experience the child will have from the father it is his smell on that used shirt. Here the spectator has the synesthetic sensation entailed by the father giving the shirt to his child: One can smell the shirt and have nostalgic and sad feelings arising from this visual experience. It is of interest to observe how the film director uses a close-up shot of a knife that, later on, will be used by his wife to commit suicide. It seems that the objects, rather than the words, are significant of what happens in the movie. The close focus on certain objects is the exemplification of the film director's intentions. Dialogues seem to be unnecessary in the understanding of the movie. The characters are treated like objects too. Tran Anh Hung does not use a subjective camera[30]. The camera never show us their point of view, we are just presented with the actions made by the character. Their movements are presented in a very detached and impersonal way. More that experiencing the drama being consumed in the family, the audience bear testimony to what is happening on the screen without sharing any of the characters' drama.

[30] The camera is used in a way that suggests the point of view of a character. High or low angle shots are generally indicative of where the character is looking from. A panoramic or panning shot suggest that he/she is surveying the scene. A tracking shot is representative of the character being in motion. Subjective shots also bring the spectator into the narrative in which the audience identifies with the point of view.

The Lady of Nam Xuong, particularly, is treated with voyeuristic tendencies. She is observed, and spied on while she cooks and perform domestic chores. The spectator can often see her framed while sitting next to the stove and cooking. Sometimes she sits next to the boiling pot doing nothing. It seems that the woman of Nam Xuong is unaware of the audience staring at her, but, at the same time, seems to pose for the camera and finds pleasure at framed. The audience does not engage with the woman of Nam Xuong character, but at the same time, finds a scopophilic pleasure in watching her posing for the camera.

It very interesting that Tran Anh Hung frames the woman while cooking traditional Vietnamese food. This is symbolic of the importance of Vietnamese food in reasserting Tran Anh Hung's Vietnameseness. Of particular note is the extreme close up on the woman's hand while washing rice. Rice is main ingredient in Vietnamese traditional cooking. In fact, it is the staple ingredient. The film director finds in the symbolism of rice a potent link that connects him to his motherland. Tran Anh Hung presents the woman of Nam Xuong in a very dualistic way. To some extent he portrays her in a very pure and traditional way. On the other way, by the way the film director choses to frame her (for example close ups on her body and her passive behavior in posing for the camera) in a highly sexualized way[31]. The woman of Nam Xuong is then transformed into a sexual object. One can say that Tran Anh Hung chooses to direct the women in such ways in order to reflect the respect and obedience Vietnamese women traditionally carried for their husband.

The Lady of Nam Xuong, is representative of the resistance and suffering that Vietnamese women have historically endured. However, the film director does not offer the woman of Nam Xuong any empowerment in his film. The woman ends up committing

[31] One can argue that Tran Anh Hung celebrates his wife's (the actress playing the woman of Nam Xuong) beauty by framing her in a certain way.

suicide because her husband, after he comes back from war, thinks she has had an affair with another man. One can argue that taking one's life is not a symbol of empowerment, but one of submission. In fact, the Lady of Nam Xuong, kills herself to redeem her husband's jealousy and to not bring shame on her family. The woman performs a self immolating act to preserve the dignity of her family.

Her imminent bad luck is symbolized by the fact that when she is sewing a sheet to project the shadow on, she is pricked by the needle she is using. Moreover, Tran Anh Hung uses a close-up here of the screen showing that a red substance is being dyed in the same place where there is the lady's blood stain. The presence of blood on objects is not an auspicious sign, and it indicates that disgraceful events are going to happen. According to Todorov's narration theory, these are objects which are considered to be agents of disruption, bringing disequilibrium to the narrative (Herman: 2009).

Another indicator of the upcoming negative event for the household is given by an image of water coming out of a barrel. Tran Anh Hung uses an extreme close-up to frame this, signifying that this event will be important in the development of the narration. Natural elements invading someone's house are perceived to be inauspicious, as it is with the water flowing out of its confined space. It has been a historically widespread idea that when natural elements cannot be controlled, some punishment is going to arrive.[32] Often signs of misfortune are thought to be sent by the deceased and indicated that the correct rituals have not been followed. The blood stained sheet and the water flowing off the barrel are both signs that indicates that an imminent catastrophe is going to happen. The catastrophe is symbolized by the death of the woman. Because the film is set during the American Vietnamese conflict,

[32] Particularly the Flood myth in European and South East Asian mythology (Van: 1993)

one can argue that the woman[33] symbolizes Viet Nam, the signs of misfortune are symbolic of the gradual fall of South Viet Nam, and the woman's death is metaphorical of the advent of Communism that forced many Vietnamese people to escape from their ancestral country.

When the woman goes to commit suicide, the film director provides a close- up of the vegetables spread on the floor that she was carrying when going back home, and a medium close-up of the family shrine with unlighted incense sticks[34]. There is a close-up on the water barrel; it is interesting to notice how it has now stopped overflowing, symbolic of bringing the chaos to an end. The medium close-up of the kitchen, and the absence of the woman in the space connotative of her presence[35], indicates the death of the woman of Nam Xuong. *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) ends as it starts, whit the image of incense burning over a back wall.

The narrative structure of the film contains symbols carried by food and objects expressing Tran Anh Hung's nostalgic feelings towards his motherland, Viet Nam. In particular, pottery and ethnically-coded foods are important to this production. As Naficy (2001) argued, this is typical of diasporic films. At first glance, the film seems to be a period piece. However, some objects and sounds reveal the period the narration take place in. The shirt that the woman's husband gives to his child is cut in a Western style; therefore it is typical of the late colonial period of the French colonization of Viet Nam. Secondly, the

[33]The figure of the female/mother carries psychological and cultural associations related to one's motherland. Motherland is a term which refers to someone's place of origin. In many culture, such as the Vietnamese and the Western ones, Earth has been associated and depicted as a mother. In Vietnamese Confucian cosmology, the Earth is yin, therefore female. Therefore, in the case of *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987), the figure of the female mother can be associated with Tran Anh Hung's motherland. The term motherland especially has the connotations of one's country of birth, with the country being viewed as being a mother, nurturing citizens as her children.

[34] This is used as a hint to let the audience know that soon, those incense sticks will be lit to pay respect to the woman's soul.

[35] One can argue that representing women in the kitchen, and framing women in spaces which are thought of as predominantly belonging to the female sphere of action and movement, is very clichéd.

woman's husband's rifle is a relatively modern one. Thirdly, there is the noise of an airplane indicative of the American-Vietnamese war. This is the sign that clearly marks the historical setting of the film. Fourthly, the box the woman of Nam Xuong uses to put her sewing set in is a French biscuit tin, reminiscent of Vietnamese colonial history.

Tran Anh Hung's translation of a traditional Vietnamese folk tale expresses his need to honour the memory of Viet Nam, and it reinforces the bonds between him and his motherland. On the other hand, using an old folk tale, also demonstrates the romantic way in which the film director see his country. *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987) sees Viet Nam as a country that will have to always endure wars and desperation; where innocent people will always be accused of actions they have not committed.

La Pierre d'Attente (The Waiting Stone) (1991)

La Pierre de l'Attente (1991) is the second short film made by French-Vietnamese director Tran Anh Hung. The film was produced and financed by Lazennec Tout Court, and like the earlier short film, is in the art-house style. The film's two principal actors are director (and Tran Anh Hung's mentor) Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung's wife, the French-Vietnamese actress Tran Nu Yên-Khê. Unfortunately, like the director's earlier production, there are no records about the critical reception of the film, again no doubt related to the fact that the film was not actually released in cinemas. Until recently it was added as bonus material in a Tran Anh Hung film box set, distributed in France by Lazennec, containing *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) and *Cyclo* (1995).

Hon Vong Phu is a Vietnamese traditional folk tale and is the basis of the film. It narrates the story of a brother and sister who are separated when young, who subsequently get married and have a son. At a certain point, the woman's husband discovers a scar she has on her head and asks her how it did happen. She tells him that at the age of four her brother beat her up then ran away, and that caused the cut. The man that realizes he is his brother in question. He takes his boat and disappears into the sea. The woman spends her life waiting for her husband on a cliff. The deities have pity on her and her faithfulness, and decide to transform her into a stone guarding the sea.

The Waiting Stone (1991) is partially autobiographical: it represents the journey of the film director's family to find a home. Tran Anh Hung's short film version of the folk tale, is, like *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987), driven more by actions and emotions that words. However, in comparison, this film contains much more dialogue. The film is set in

two very distinct places: a Vietnamese refugee camp in Indonesia and the lady and her husband's flat in France. The first location is a transitional border space: a refugee camp for boat people.[36] The viewer knows that the characters are in a refugee camp because the author specifies this at the beginning of the film. The setting gives a sense of historicity to the film[37]while, at the same time, it represents a common feature that has shaped Vietnamese identities in modern times. Furthermore, it remarks upon the exilic status of Tran Anh Hung and the Vietnamese who embarked upon journeys bringing them out of their motherland. A refugee camp is a potent sign and symbol of the displacement endured by the Vietnamese diaspora during the American-Vietnamese conflict. In this particular setting, Tran Anh Hung does not show the viewer any objects or any icons of the characters' Vietnamese past. This is to emphasize the very transitional nature of such places, and to accentuate how individuals living in these conditions were denied of their own subjectivities. Moreover, in refugee camps, the absence of objects was also caused by the fact that the boat people, when leaving Viet Nam, had to leave behind their possessions, if they had any left after they paid for the travel. Their objects were permeated with memories of the lost mother country. The Vietnamese escaping from Viet Nam lost both their country and their memories.

In the refugee camp the atmosphere is claustrophobic. The barracks where the refugees are put is crammed and lacking in light. The lighting style used to shoot the scenes in the barrack is realistic, with low-key light so that the spectator can perceive the veridicality of the situation portrayed in the short film by Tran Anh Hung. The claustrophobic space in which Tran Anh Hung creates his *mise-en-scene* in the barracks, and the low lighting used, create a sense of claustrophobia. However, this sense of claustrophobia is not actually

[36]The refugee camp where the man and woman temporarily live represents a transitional border space. The refugees' journey characterized by homelessness creates a dystopian vision of the future yet to come.
[37]Vietnamese escaping from Viet Nam by boat, after the follow of Saigon the 30th April 1975, are referred to as boat people. Vietnamese boat people ended up in refugee camps. There were refugee camps in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

revealed by the characters themselves, who seem relatively safe in those settings.[38] The barracks also represent an enclosed space that the refugees want to escape from. One of the first things the man says to the woman after she sees her arriving at the camp is: "*Vous parlez Francais? Pour quitter le camp, il faut apprendre.*"[39] The Vietnamese man sees this space as a transitional one. This is the space the Vietnamese refugees had to get through in order to be relocated in Western countries, and to find "home":

> Man: *Beaucoups de gens sont comme vous. C'est aussi mon cas.* (Many people are in the same situation as your one.)
>
> Woman: *Je n'ai plus personne.* (I no longer have anyone.)
>
> Man: *Il faut se resigner.* (We need to resign ourselves to this.)[40]

The man is aware that these instances are not individual, but shared by many exilic Vietnamese. The man does not give space to the woman to make her story more dramatic that the other ones. The sense of displacement in the camp can be seen as a unifying experience for the Vietnamese diaspora.[41] Moreover his remark on being resigned to one's fate expresses the Confucian Vietnamese way of acceptance and endurance of one's destiny.

The sense of isolation of the two characters ends when the man gives the woman something to eat. Tran Anh Hung frames this scene by a close-up on the hands of the man offering the lady some food wrapped in paper, and of the woman's hand accepting the food

---

[38] The boat people might felt positive about the space in the refugee camp because they were coming from highly dangerous, and extremely chaotic, overfilled, dark, unhygienic spaces like boats' decks. Moreover, the Vietnamese reaching these places were obviously relieved they did not die at sea, killed by pirates, drowning, by hanger, or illness.

[39] "*Do you speak French? To leave the camp you need to learn it.*" This sentence also signifies that in order to leave the camp, the refugees need to start learning the language of the country that will host them. In doing so, Vietnamese refugees are also starting to hybridize their identities. (Translated by the author)

[40] Translated by the author

[41] Many diasporic Vietnamese built links and connections among their community by sharing the narratives of their exilic journeys. The VietKA (Archives of Vietnamese Boat People) is a website where Vietnamese boat people share stories of their journey to reach a new home: www.vietka.com.

and touching the man's hands. This shot establishes that a deep relation will develop between the two characters. Sharing food is a strong symbol of bond and interdependency (Telfer: 1996). However, this action has even stronger symbolic implications when performed in a time of food scarcity. The generosity expressed by the man, and the way in which the man and woman's hands softly touch each others, informs the spectators that the two will have an amorous relationship.

Tran Anh Hung sets the second part of *The Waiting Stone* (1991) in France. The Vietnamese diasporic couple now lives in an apartment, in what was their former colonial master. The second part of the film is set in the couple's flat, and a few scenes take place in the courtyard[42] where the Vietnamese people live. The transitional space that characterized the refugee camp has been transformed into the secure, intimate, and domestic space of a house. The light that has been used to photograph the house is generally low key. Naficy (2001) argued that enclosed spaces and low key light are generally used in diasporic cinema to convey a sense of constriction and claustrophobia. This shot composition helps the film narrative in constructing a sense of temporal impediment of movement: for instance, look at the way the character of the woman is framed, always inside the house, looking outside the windows. However, it can be argued that this is not a sign of the wife's imprisonment, but is, rather, symbolic of the faithfulness this woman has for her spouse[43]. On the other hand one can say that the woman is confined to the domestic sphere because she is too "Vietnamese" and not sufficiently hybridised to be part of French society. Therefore, before this can

[42] Tran Anh Hung shows the spectator the courtyard using a long shot. The camera is positioned to give the audience an aerial view. There are constructions in the courtyard whose roofs are reminiscent of pagodas. Moreover, the film director shows, with a medium shot, a *restaurant Japonais*. Tran Anh Hung shot this scene in an Asian quarter in France: this seems to remark about the Vietnamese diasporic people, in France, have being categorized as merely "Oriental" and therefore being denied their individuality.

[43] Blum-Reid (2003) argued that the woman, in *Waiting of Stone*, has been transformed into a rock because of her faithfulness to her husband. One can argue that the space the woman is confined in- her French flat- is a place that the viewer does not see her leaving. Her inability to move makes her static. The woman's stillness is symbolic of her becoming a "stone".

happen, she has to compromise her traditional Vietnamese feminine identity for a more Western one. After the woman receives a telephone call from her husband saying that they are brother and sister, she has a dream. The film director does not show the audience the dream. The shot frames the woman's face in a close-up. We hear the extradiegetic sound of a Vietnamese mother and daughter talking with each other:

> Daughter: *On ne peut pas faire autrement.* (I cannot do otherwise)
>
> Mother: *Non! On trouvera un autre moyen.* (No, we will find another way)
>
> Daughter: *Il n'y a pas de meilleur solution. On s'est deja tue au travail. On va mourir de* faim (There are not better solutions. We have already been killed at work. We are going to starve.)
>
> Mother: *Plutôt mourir!* (I would rather die)
>
> Daughter: *Maman, je ne suis pas mieux qu'elles...* (Mum, I am not any better that those...)
>
> Mother: *Tais-toi! Je ne veux plus t'entendre. Non, c'est non.* (Shut-up! I do not want hear you anymore. No is no)
>
> Daughter: *Maman, accepte. Ce sont des femmes bien: des etudiantes...des femmes mariee...Elle font ca pour nourrir leur famille.* (Mother, accept it. Those are good women: students, married women...They just do it to feed their family)
>
> Mother: *Elle font ce qu'elle veulent. Si tu le fais, je me ne tue. Tu ne seras pas un putain, tu m'entends? Plutôt mourir, ma tu ne seras pas un putain!* (They do what they want. If you do it, I will kill myself. You are not going to be a whore, understand? I would rather die, but you will never be a whore)[44].

This dialogue takes place within the woman's conflicted identity and mind. To some extent she wants to free herself from the traditional Vietnamese culture in order to assert herself to the world and to sustain her family. On the other hand, the "mother" (the traditional Vietnamese part of herself) will not allow that to happen. The dialogue is ended by the mother saying that she prefers starvation that having a daughter working as a prostitute. Tran Anh Hung shows how virtuous Vietnamese traditional women are by putting their moral

[44] Translated by the author.

integrity over anything else. Tran Anh Hung, by showing the woman's faithfulness to her husband and her rejection of compromised ways, intends to show that Confucian Vietnamese values will be always be a predominant part of the woman's identity. Furthermore, the director is expressing respect for women who have had to live by these values (although, importantly, not saying that this is ideal ordering of society). The identity dilemma suffered by the Vietnamese woman is resolved by her listening to her the "mother" part of the self, to the traditional woman. The idealistic way of being takes over from the pragmatic one. No matter if she is going to starve her family, she won't allow it to lose its values. The film director romanticizes, while at the same time paying homage, to the suffering endured by Vietnamese women during times of social and individual instability such as wars and exilic journeys. It can be argued that the women in Tran Anh Hung's shorts films are not empowered; they cannot reverse or take control over their fate and suffering.[45] However, the film director celebrates them for their virtue. *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1989) remarks on women, morality and traditional ways of living typical of the traditional Confucian teachings.

The director also uses objects that are icons of both the Vietnamese cultural heritage of the couple and the Vietnamese-French hybrid identity of the film director. In the flat there is a small banana tree. Banana trees are common in Viet Nam: this plant is a reminder of the couple's and film director's mother land. Hanging on a wall there is a Vietnamese calendar with a Vietnamese pastoral painting on it, also an object evocative of Viet Nam. In particular, both objects recall Viet Nam's natural and traditional environment. Tran Anh Hung uses them in order to evoke an idyllic and crystalized image of his motherland. Naficy (2001)

[45] The impossibility of changing, and therefore the necessity of accepting, one's fate is typical of Vietnamese traditional culture. This idea of destiny has been represented in Vietnamese diasporic films focusing on Viet Nam -such as *Spirits* (2004). The Vietnamese diasporic film directors, by using the traditional Vietnamese notion of fate and destiny, remark upon their cultural belonging and familiarity to Vietnamese culture.

stated that this way of fetishizing objects is typical of accented cinema. Additionally, lots of attention it is given to objects belonging to the realm of food. The short film incorporates close-up shots of a rice cooker, pans, pottery, typical Vietnamese ingredients such as pak-choi, fish sauce, rice and other Vietnamese foods that the woman prepares for her husband. Again, Tran Anh Hung frames the woman's hands while preparing traditional Vietnamese food, as he did in previously in *The Married Lady of Nam Xuong* (1987). The attention paid by the film director to showing the viewer these daily actions involving ethnic culinary traditions is highly significant because it demonstrates the symbolic importance that Tran Anh Hung attaches to them. Food is used, in this case, to reaffirm someone's identity. Both consuming Vietnamese food and having objects that recall Viet Nam makes people feel that Viet Nam is close to them, and that they are close to Viet Nam.

The broken boiler has also got a symbolic function in the film narrative signified by the director's choice of framing it with a close-up. The boiler brings warmth to the house, and makes a home comfortable, especially in winter, much as a traditional Vietnamese family brings warmth to its individuals. Tran Anh Hung compares having a cold house to having a troubled familiar unity. In fact, one of the last shots of the film, after the woman's husband has revealed their incestuous relations, is a close-up over the broken boiler. Family is extremely important in Vietnamese society. However, the family unity has suffered much destruction during Vietnamese history: the Vietnamese independence war against the French, the American-Vietnamese conflict, and the mass exodus out of Viet Nam fragmented the Vietnamese familial unity. The disintegration of the familial unity is the root cause of the incestuous relationship between the brother and the sister. *The Waiting Stone* (1991) and *The Married Lady of Nam Xuang* (1987) both focus on Vietnamese family fragmentation due to wars. Tran Anh Hung in these two short documentaries implies that women, the main

characters in these two films, are the ones who are subjected to most of the stress by having them be the incarnation of a functional household.

The Waiting Stone (1991) was shot in Vietnamese. However, in contrast to *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987), there are French subtitles. Interestingly, at the start of the film, there is French text on screen narrating the story of The Waiting Stone. This production is clearly aimed, in part, at a non Vietnamese audience. The on-screen text revealing the old folk tale gives the audience cultural information on Viet Nam which facilitates the audience's understanding of the film's narrative structure. The film is also multivocal. In fact, there are extradiegetic voices in the narrations: Tran Anh Hung uses two extradiegetic songs sung in Vietnamese language. The use of traditional music further remarks upon the Vietnameseness of the woman and her husband. Using music from Viet Nam conveys to the spectators a feel of authenticity. Moreover, the use of a traditional Vietnamese product can be seen as the director remarking about his Vietnamese identity.

L'Odeur de la Papaye Verte (Mùi đu đủ xanh) (The Scent of Green Papaya) (1993)

The Scent of Green Papaya (1993) is written and directed by Tranh Anh Hung. The film was made in France, in Bry-sur-Marne film studios. The movie was financed and produced by Lazennec Films, La Sept Cinéma, Canal+, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Procirep, Fondation GAN pour le Cinéma, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication and Sacem. The production's principal actor is Tran Nu Yên-Khê, the director's wife. The film's style of photography (the predominance of close-ups and extreme close-ups), its slow narrative pace, and its synesthetic qualities, make it more palatable to art-house film viewers than to a mass audience. The film "is first of all a film of great visual beauty; watching it is like seeing a poem for the eyes" (Ebert: 1994). Similarly, film critic Maslin opines that the film "marks a luxuriant, visually seductive debut for Mr. Hung, whose film is often so wordlessly evocative that it barely needs dialogue. Reaching into the past for its precisely drawn memories, it casts a rich, delicate spell" (Maslin: 1993).

The story concerns a ten year old girl from the countryside called Mui.[46] In 1951, she moves to Saigon to become a servant for a bourgeois Vietnamese family. However, after a series of unfortunate events Mui, in 1961, becomes a servant of a friend of the family she works for because they cannot afford to hire her services anymore. The film was the first full-length made by the French-Vietnamese film director. As in his short cinematic production, this film uses dialogue sparingly. The spectators focus their attention on the rich aesthetic of the *mise-en-scene*.

[46] *Mui* in Vietnamese means scent. However, Tran Anh Hung has said that there is no link between Mui's name and the title of the film.

Tran Anh Hung wanted to shoot his first feature film in Viet Nam. However, when the film director and his troupe started filming there, they had to stop due to the rainy season. Later, *La Societe Francaise de Production* offered to participate in the making of the film and persuaded the film director and his crew to shoot it in its two studios outside of Paris, in Bry-sur-Marne. However, Tran Anh Hung considers Viet Nam as his preferred filming location. He argues that framing in an apartment does not give him the freedom to move the camera as he wants to:

> The process confusing the frame and the image and the border of the support has important consequences on the spectator's imagination. The cutting attributed to the dimension of the support more than a choice of framing, pushes the spectator to imaginarily construct what one does not see in the visual field of representation, but what completes it: the outside field (Joly quoted in Blum- Reid: 2003: 64).

> It is for me a huge handicap to shoot in France, because I don't see how I can take a frame in an apartment. By this I mean, that it is an entire interrogation linked to the writing of a film. In addition, it is entirely related to cinema. Vietnam gives me the freedom, this range of frames, and allows me to make everything believable...people won't say, but is the position of the camera, why such an awkward angle, this will not seem strange because of space (Makki cited in Blum-Reid: 2003: 65).

Due to the space constriction, the film is framed in a theatrical style. Tran Anh Hung focuses much of his work here on extreme close-up or close-up. Rosenbaum argues that "[...]it's refreshing to see a third-world feature characterized more by studio mise en scene than by pseudodocumentary techniques- [...]" (Rosenbaum:1994).[47] The camera moves smoothly

[47] It interesting to note how some critics consider films made by the diaspora to be 'Third World' productions. Bhabha (1989) argued that the use of this term remains hugely problematic because of its pejorative connotations and its political assumption about a geopolitical world view. Moreover, *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) cannot be categorized as a third world production because it was not made by an indigenous Vietnamese film maker, but by a French-Vietnamese film director, was not shot in Viet Nam, and was

through the space, in what in film language is known as a 'long take'.[48] This long take shows the audience the structure of the two houses, those of the mistress and Khuyen, where the film mostly takes place. The other two settings used in the films are: Mui' mistress' shop and the street where Mui lives with the bourgeois family.

The first part of the film takes place in the mistress' house. Stylistically this house is modeled on a 19th century traditional Vietnamese house. In fact, in this way, there is a small yard between buildings in order to allow light, air, and a bit of space to grow few vegetables. Furthermore, the part of the ground floor facing the street is used to sell goods, and the inner space on the ground floor forms part of the accommodation, with a kitchen, and a toilet. On the first floor there is a room used for worshipping and the bedrooms. The house in the film differs from the traditional style only by the fact that there are bedrooms surrounding the courtyard. The second floor of house comprises a family shrine, the grandmother's bedroom and small living room. The film director tries to give a sense of veridicality to the setting.

The family's house is located in a natural setting strongly reminiscent of Viet Nam's flora and fauna. In the courtyard there is a papaya tree, *schefflera arboricola* and *ficus bejamina*. The viewers can see that these plants are merely used to recreate a sense of tropical paradise. However, these trees are typical of Viet Nam and they have been used to give a precise sense of Vietnameseness to the setting. As mentioned above, Tran Anh Hung wanted to shoot *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) in Viet Nam, and the director and crew tried to recreate Viet Nam in Bry-sur-Marne studios. The frogs, crickets, red ants, and the

---

completely financed by *Les Productions Lazannec, LA STP Cinema, La Sept Cinema, Canal Plus*, and the *Centre Nationale de la Cinematographie*.

[48] This term comes from the French plan sequence. This definition refers to a long take where many different movements take place in a single shot with no editing. Antonioni and De Palma are film directors famous for using this style.

extradiegetic sounds of birds are species indigenous of Viet Nam. Tran Anh Hung's aim was to make a film outside of Viet Nam that seemed to have been shot in his mother country.

> To ensure authenticity, they [... the film director and crew...] gathered old photographs of Vietnamese households and village streets and carefully researched the plants and insects of the region (Scarlet Cheng: 2001).

The feel of authenticity is reconstructed through pictures[49] and memories. However, the film director stated that shooting in Viet Nam would have not been possible because the Viet Nam Tran Anh Hung depicts in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (2003) is too far removed from the one in his script:

> Lawrence Chua: You returned to Vietnam to scout for the locations for this film and then you turned and made the film on a soundstage in France. How did your trip affect the way the film looks now? Where there any narrative changes that you made after the visit to Vietnam?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: Not really. This was an extremely mental film, and it gives mental image of Vietnam. It's not a documentary. So the only thing I had to do was resist, in a sense, the reality that I discovered because that reality in front of me risked destroying the script that I had written. I had to return, or pull back my mental state, the indices of reality. It was only by doing this that I managed to produce something that was extremely Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, the Vietnamese were unanimous on this when they saw the film. Both younger and older film people said that they needed a young Vietnamese person living away from Vietnam, to create something that was extremely Vietnamese (Chua: 1994).

Tran Anh Hung exemplifies the manner in which diasporic Vietnamese directors recreate a Viet Nam that is removed from real Vietnamese life. It is, rather, a projection of their idea of

[49] Photographic images promote a personal relation to the context. Photography produces what Cartier-Bresson defined as the "no-time-at-all". The camera captures images available to be manipulated, transformed and appropriated (Lury: 1998). Tran Anh Hung and his crew used photographs to reconstruct a Vietnamese space have been filled with the film director and crew's fantasies and utopian vision about France's former colony.

Viet Nam. In particular, *The Scent of Green Papaya* manifests the colonial French phantasmogoric cinematic tendencies by which the film-makers represent Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Tran Anh Hung films his ancestral country in the same nostalgic and exotic manner by which French film directors have narrated stories of the former French colony. This manner of framing Vietnam is symbolic of his hybrid identity.

The *mise-en-scene* recreated in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) conforms to the Western stereotype, and especially the French one, of an exotic land. Tran Anh Hung's vision of Viet Nam has been shaped by the French nostalgic, exotic, and erotic associations with Viet Nam. The director is trapped into a dichotomy that, to one extent, pulls him towards representing Viet Nam from a Vietnamese point of view. On the other hand, Tran Anh Hung cannot avoid representing his ancestral land in a French narrative style that fixes the colonized culture by making it unchanged, as Niranjana (cited in Norindr :1996: 15) argues, rather than historically constructed. The paradox is that the film director seems to be trapped in this dichotomy; it is a manifestation of his hybrid identity and the contradictory natures of the Vietnamese and French cultural background he grew up in.

As mentioned above, Vietnamese people said that they needed a Vietnamese person living outside of Viet Nam, because certain crystalized memories can be part of someone who *remembers*, but is he/she is not directly aware of the Vietnamese quotidian way of living. Tran Anh Hung expresses his frustration of testimony Viet Nam in its real nature. A similar disappointment with Vietnamese 'reality' was, for instance, expressed by the film director Regis Wargnier when he went to Viet Nam to shoot *Indochine* (1992). The 'Vietnamese space' imagined by the two film directors is linked to the illusory narrative encoded by France upon its former colony.

The first half of *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) is set in Saigon in 1953. The first shot shows the alley where the house stands, at night. Mui is framed walking in this street while looking for the house. The sounds that the viewer hears are the extradiegetic composition of the diasporic Vietnamese musician Ton That Tiet, and the extradiegetic chirp of crickets. Tran Anh Hung's setting and framing of the scene is very similar to one of the first shots of Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight* (1957). One can notice the camera angle is the same in both shots[50]. Borrowing from other film directors' styles is a typical component of diasporic cinema (Naficy: 2001: 19).

The film director gives the audience the time frame in which the film is supposed to take place: it is Saigon in 1951. When Mui arrives at the house, the mistress immediately brings her to Ti, the older house servant. One of the first images Tran Anh Hung frames of the mistress is her bringing a tea to her husband. The master plays traditional Vietnamese music with a typical Vietnamese instrument called a moon lute. This gives the audience a feeling of authenticity. Moreover, the film director has a close-up of the tea pot and cup used to serve tea. The objects are in a Vietnamese traditional style. The only discrepancy in this Vietnamese environment is the Western style pajamas worn by the house master. The intricate pattern design of the pottery is a sign of the wealthy status of the family. The mistress serving her husband tea is indicative of the inferior position Vietnamese women had in the Vietnamese patriarchal household. The respect and obedience the house mistress shows towards her husband is also represented by the way she treats her mother in law: "*Mother is going to bed. I'll go up and help her.*" Such respect towards women's 'in-laws' is a cultural norm in Viet Nam. An historical hint about the Viet Nam war for independence is provided

[50] Tran Anh Hung, like Yasujiru Ozu, uses a low camera; this way of filming breaks the rules of conventional film making. Yasujiro Ozu's unconventional shooting style has been categorized as part of art cinema. Tran Anh Hung, by using the camera in a low angle, and by the extensive use of close-ups, breaking the rules of conventional cinema, can then be categorized as an art cinema maker.

by the house mistress when she says: "*It's the curfew soon and Troung isn't back yet*". The curfew, with the extradiegetic sound of airplanes, is the only reference to the war of liberation happening in Viet Nam.

Truong does not wear Vietnamese clothes either. However he discloses his Vietnameseness when he starts playing (accompanied by his father on the moon lute) a typical Vietnamese instrument, similar to a flute, known as a sao. Tran Anh Hung ends the night sequence with a close-up of two traditional Vietnamese objects, a bonsai and an antique vase. The director, by filming such objects, is able to evoke nostalgia for an imagined Orient, to both a Vietnamese and a Western audience, by framing objects in such a stylized and highly aesthetic manner. The viewer feels they can almost touch the vase, and smell the Saigon night. Naficy (1993) argued that, in exiled filmic and television narratives, attention has to be paid to non-audiovisual ways of expression:

> The exiles produce their difference not just through what they see and hear but through their sense of smell, taste, and touch. Indeed, these aspects of sensorium often provide, more than sight and hearing, poignant remainders of difference and separation from homeland (Naficy:1993:152-153).

The film director fetishizes Vietnamese-looking objects in an attempt to fill the gap separating him from Viet Nam, his mother land. The first daytime sight the spectators have of the Saigon house is a medium shot framing Mui's bedroom window overlooking the papaya tree. The extradiegetic sound of birds helps give the idea of an early morning. Ti, in the meanwhile, chops a green papaya from the tree. The first thing Mui sees in the morning is the papaya tree and the older servant cutting its fruit. The viewer has constant signs reminding them of the setting of the film. In particular, the green papaya is the object upon which the film narrative is based. The synesthetic properties of the fruit, and the place it grows,

awakens young Mui's sensorial apparatus. Tran Anh Hung frames her sniffing the air around the papaya tree, while staring at it. The film director has an extreme close-up on a papaya tree leaf stained by the milk dripping from the stem of the chopped fruit. Exotic fruits in Western societies, as previously mentioned, are symbolically associated with sensuality and lusciousness. The shot strongly evokes a sexual and sensual image. The extradiegetic sound of a mysterious and motif-less music makes the spectator even more aware of the ambivalent properties of the fruit. The way in which Ti washes it conveys to the audience a phallocentric image.

The taste Mui has of this fascinating and sensual world is interrupted by the sound of a frying pan, a noise that contrast with the extradiegetic music and bird singing of the previous shots, and the voice of Ti. Here, Tran Anh Hung choses a medium shot over Ti showing Mui how to stir fry vegetables. The film director's close-ups, and extreme close-ups, on food give the audience a multi-sensorial experience. An American woman who had one Vietnamese grandmother recalled that while watching Ti preparing food she felt very nostalgic for her grandmother.[51] The food that the director frames is typical Vietnamese home-made cuisine that it is not possible to find in restaurants.[52] The American woman reported she could smell and taste the food. In that moment she said she was feeling very emotional and missing her Vietnamese grandmother. The woman experienced a so-called Proustian moment. Ethnic food, for diasporas, strongly recalls the mother country, or former homes; a whole array of memories starts to flow when they get in contact with it.

[51] Student comment in seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London: 2007.
[52] The person in charge of making the food for the set was Tran Anh Hung's mother. Mrs Tran prepared typical home-made Vietnamese food. Moreover, the fact the film director asked his mother to prepare the food is indicative that the film is artisanally-made. Furthermore, the film director by doing this shows the symbolic links between women, food and the idea of home.

Tran Anh Hung presents food preparation in a way that even individuals not familiar with Vietnamese food can find their mouths salivating while watching the images on screen. The audience finds the setting so aesthetically pleasing that they want to taste it. Rosenbaun (1994) reported that in Los Angeles, following the showing of *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), people were offered a banquet of the dishes appearing in the film. One can argue that this is recognition of the synesthetic qualities of the film. On the other hand, this is symptomatic of the "orientalized" way in which Tran Anh Hung portrays Viet Nam. The film director presents Viet Nam as an exotic commodity palatable for the Western public.

The first appearance that Khuyen makes in Mui's life is on her first day of duty at the house while she is serving lunch. Mui sees him from the master's mother's bedroom while she is helping the old lady, the master, and his younger child with their meal. The focal point of the old lady's apartment is the huge and elaborate shrine with the pictures of, and offerings to, the dead family members. The decor of her space is typical of a wealthy Vietnamese household. The furniture is inlaid and gold-painted. The film director uses a close-up shot of the pictures of the lady's husband and of her niece. Next to the pictures, in bowls decorated in a typical Vietnamese style, there are offerings of fruit and flowers. The ancestor's altar plays an important part in traditional Vietnamese culture; Tran Anh Hung, by using close-ups here, is emphasizing the importance of the shrine in Vietnamese society. The director, in remarking on such a tradition, expresses his belonging to the Vietnamese traditional culture. Even Ti, the old house servant, in her bedroom has a small shrine where she prays and burns incense sticks as soon as she wakes up.

When going down the stairs Mui stares at Khuyen; in doing so, she expresses that she likes him by covering her face with the tray she is holding. The film director plays a visual

trick to the audience here in making them think that Khuyen is staring back at Mui, when he is only saying goodbye to Mui's mistress. While having her dinner Mui asks Ti about Khuyen. The audience can see what is taking place outside the house when the film director frames the house mistress and Ti working in the fabric shop. Mui in the afternoon has to do some domestic chores. While the women are working, the males are framed lazing around. The house master plays the moon lute. Tin is having a nap, while Lam is pouring hot wax on red ants. The importance here is that the director is emphasizing the lazy nature of Vietnamese men, while, at the same time, constructing a positive image of Vietnamese womanhood working hard in order to keep the household from falling apart.

Mui is teased by Tin when cleaning the house. One can argue that this behavior reflects the inferiority of women in the traditional Vietnamese environment. However, people of Asian background have perceived this way of behaving in a fraternal way showing the acceptance of Mui as Tin's sister. Indeed, one can say that the house mistress treats the young servant almost like a daughter. She allows Mui to go and see her mother at regular time intervals, and treats her in a very motherly way. As the mistress says at the start to the film to her husband, Mui would have almost the age of their dead daughter. Tran Anh Hung indicates to the audience the close relationship the mistress has with Mui by portraying both of them in the kitchen. The mistress prepares food while Mui is filling a pot with water. We then see a close-up of the mistress' face while smiling; she is observing Mui washing her arms in the kitchen.

The film viewer sees that the only contact Mui has with the external world is when going to get some rice cakes from the alley where the mistress' house stands. The extradiegetic sounds coming from the street deeply differ from the intimate sounds of the

house in which Mui lives. On the street the audience can hear a radio playing a popular and happy Vietnamese song. The sounds of birds, crickets, and the traditional Vietnamese instrument played by Truong and his father, and the sound of the *mo gia tri* used by the grandmother to give rhythm to her prayers are in opposition to the ones in the alley. The street contains a joyous and lively atmosphere that lacks in the house where Mui lives. The colors in the streets are predominantly yellow evoking joy and happiness, while, in the house, tend to be dominated by greens, which, in Western culture, are associated with nature. In Vietnamese popular culture, green is associated with health and prosperity, but also linked with infidelity.[53] The director, by providing the audience with this synesthetic information, enables it to experience his phantasmatic Viet Nam.

Tran Anh Hung's *The Married Woman of Nam Xuong* (1987), *The Waiting Stone* (1991) and *The Scent of Green Papaya* all have in common idiosyncratic families malfunctioning due to the absence of the father figure. Mui had to become a servant because her father died three years earlier and her mother could not have cared for Mui and her younger sister anymore. In the three films, Tran Anh Hung celebrates the sacrifices Vietnamese women go through for the integrity of the family unit. The audience learns from Ti, that the master's father died while he was still young. One can say that his passion for gambling and women was one the consequence of not having a father. Tran Anh Hung shows that the loose way of life of the house master is thought to have caused the death of To, his daughter:

> Ti: *Seven years ago, the master left the house with all the family's money. It was the third time he'd done that. Before, when he'd spent it all, he came back. But that time, he was away longer than usual.*

[53] The viewer speculates that the house master, during his long absence away from home, conducts an immoral and promiscuous life.

Mui: *But the other time, when he came back, she didn't say anything?*

Ti: *Nothing, not a single word. She was happy. She cried for joy.*

Mui: *What about To, then*?

[...]

Ti: *Three weeks after he left, To fell ill. And the day before he returned, she died. He must have thought she died to atone for the sins he committed. That's why he never leaves the house anymore.*

The same night Ti tells Mui about the house master's promise, he leaves the house stealing the family's money and his wife's jewels. The morning after the master goes away, his wife asks Ti how much rice is left and orders her to go to the market and make sure the family have enough food to last for a few days. Tran Anh Hung aims to show here how men were sometimes detrimental to the family unity. Women, in hardship, were left on their own having to care for the elderly and the children. The film director wants *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) to pay homage to the Vietnamese women making sacrifices for their families, while at the same time suffering the abuses of men.

The house mistress, despite being left by her husband, tries to live a normal life. However, Tin keeps asking about his father and expresses his frustration by playing even more nasty tricks on Mui. For instance, Tin urinates in one of the vases she is cleaning. The poor economic situation the mistress' family is now suffering is reflected in the food that Ti and Mui prepares. The servants cook with cheaper ingredients and try to make up for the lack of proteins with some culinary tricks. As Tin says: "*When there's not enough, use a lot of salt. That way, they'll eat more rice with the dishes.*" Tin, while eating the overly salty meat, complains it is not good. Lan tells him to eat. Lan expresses his frustration for his father's departure by stamping over his book and killing the only waxed ant remained alive. The father's disappearance causes his family members to be very frustrated and stressed. The

master's family has now reached the point where they cannot even afford to buy rice anymore. However, women have to be blamed for their husbands' moral vacuity. The mistress' mother in law blames his wife for him having let the house:

> Grandmother: *It's your fault. If you'd know how to love him, he wouldn't have left with other women. I knew it from the start: my son would be unhappy with you. You have a husband, and you don't know how to make him happy.*

The house mistress cannot find comfort even in her mother in law. The old woman blames her for not being a good wife. Mui continues to serve the family and she is soon allowed to pick a papaya fruit by herself. The film director uses a close-up of Mui's hands while harvesting it from the tree. In the background we hear extradiegetic music building-up the suspense. Tran Anh Hung utilises a close-up here of the cage where two crickets[54] are kept as pets, and an extreme close-up of the papaya stem dripping a white substance similar to milk. The shots here, especially the extreme close up of the dripping stem, have strong sexual connotation. The film director is attempting to describe the papaya as a site of sensual pleasure; this goes even further when he frames Mui cutting the papaya in half, dipping her finger into the papaya cavity full of unripe seeds and playing with them. The papaya milk is symbolic of male sensuality, the papaya seeds of the female one. The unripe papaya and seeds are symbolic of Mui's immature sexuality.

This sensual scene culminates with the mistress being able to afford to buy some food, indeed good quality ingredients, and inviting Khuyen for dinner. Mui, being pleased by having the chance to meet him again asks Ti: "Can I fry the vegetables on my own?" This

[54] The crickets express intense sensuality too. The sounds coming from Mui's crickets are that of the species mating.

comment tells the audience how important is the symbolic function of food. By cooking the vegetables on her own, Mui wants Khuyen to taste her. The young servant wants the Vietnamese gentleman to have a taste of her, she wants to be consumed by him and become part of his body. Food is used by Mui to have access to Khuyen. Mui transmigrates her identity in the food she cooks for him. The traditional Vietnamese food cooked by Mui is expressive of her Vietnamese traditional identity. Mui, to attract Khuyen's attention also wears a new red[55] top, and ties her hair with a new elastic band. The blossoming femininity of Mui is also visually represented by the act of her using the family pond as a mirror to see if she is pretty enough to serve Khuyen. The way the film director frames Mui when entering the room to serve dinner also reveals the attraction the girl feels for the Vietnamese gentleman. Mui's understanding of love between men and women is shown when she gives Mr. Thuan permission to go upstairs to secretly watch the master's mother while she recites her prayers.

More prayers are needed for the house master. The man comes back home ill. Once again, all the family money has to be spent to pay him a doctor. The only consolation the mistress receives is from his son Lam. To pay for the husband's cure she has to sell a few of the family's possession. The doctor called by the family is a traditional Vietnamese one. He cures the master using acupuncture, *moxa*[56], and some traditional music. Tran Anh Hung shows his hybrid Franco-Vietnamese roots in presenting the audience with the native medicine of his mother country. The traditional diegetic music is rhythmed by the *mo gia tri* the master's mother uses to pray. The master's death is anticipated by the ending of his

[55] Red in Vietnamese culture is associated with good luck and happiness. In Western society, it is a color associated with passion and love. Mui, by wearing a red top, expresses her joy and passion in seeing Khuyen. The film director links the symbolism of both Vietnamese and Western cultures by making Mui wear the colour.
[56] Substance related to mugwort used in Eastern medicine. It is burned on or near skin as a counter-irritant.

mother's rhythmic beating and the strike of the bell indicating the finishing of her prayers session.

The transition between Mui's adolescence and adulthood happens with a morphing sequence, after which the viewer sees Mui a decade older. The servant still looks with the same interest to the house's microcosmos, but the house has changed dramatically. Ti is not there anymore, Troung is married to Mai, Lam and Tin have left the house, and the mistress now occupies the space once used by her mother in law. Mui is asked to leave and work in Khuyen's house because they cannot afford to pay her salary anymore. The house mistress, before leaving, gives Mui golden jewels and a red *ao doi*. The house mistress also reveals to Mui that she hoped Lam would have taken her as a wife. This sympathy for Mui makes the story almost unreal. In Viet Nam, according to the director, shifting social position has always been forbidden (Rosebrun: 1994). People were supposed to marry individuals from the same background. This is one of the elements that gives *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) an unreal, inauthentic feel. The house mistress is very upset about Mui leaving, during the years she has been a source of comfort. The mistress considers her to be her daughter.

The first image the audience has of Mui in Khuyen's house is a close-up of her hands washing vegetables in the kitchen. The sounds in Khuyen's house are very different from the house in Mui's old one. Khuyen is a pianist, and composer, who received his music diploma from the Conservatoire National Superieur de Musique, a Parisian school of music. The extradiegetic sound is often of him playing Western style music on the piano. The house Khuyen lives in combines Western and Vietnamese influences. The piano and desk lamps are in a typical Western style. The Buddha's heads and statues are Vietnamese. Khuyen wears traditional Western clothes. The passage from Mui's childhood to adulthood is also

symbolized by the colors she is surrounded by. She goes from a house surrounded by green, the colour of the unripe papaya, to a house where the color yellow is predominant, the color of the ripe papaya fruit. This maturity is reflected in Mui's awakening sensuality. The way Khuyen and his house are portrayed symbolizes Khuyen's hybrid identity, and the space in which he can freely express this.. He is the representation of how French culture was able to permeate into Vietnamese traditions, almost to the extent of making the latter look antiquated.

Mui continues to perform her house chores, but she is framed in a way that makes it seem that she is being spied on. The sensual and delicate nature of Mui is further accentuated by the extradiegetic, romantic, at least in Western societies, music of Claude Debussy's *Au Claire de Lune* sonata[57]. It is in this instance that for the first time the spectators recognize the seductive power of Mui. In opposition to the Westernized world of Khuyen, there is the traditional Vietnamese culture embodied by Mui. The spaces reserved for the servant are Vietnamese, and the food she cooks, and the way she performs the house chores, is ethnically coded. The objects in the kitchen and bedroom are not been influenced by the Western style. The most intimate parts of the house are still traditionally Vietnamese. In contrast to the traditional and romantic Mui, we perceive the vibrant and Westernized girlfriend of Khuyen. The diegetic soundtrack associated with the latter is Frederic Chopin's Prelude number 23.

Thu is depicted as an indiscreet woman who prefers Western culture over the intimate Vietnamese one. She is described as a 'Western free lady', who wants to have access to Khuyen's music work, and who prefers restaurants over the intimate atmosphere of a ready prepared homely meal. Thu wears Western clothes and accessories. The director makes 'good

[57] Uniting Eastern and Western tradition so elegantly and smoothly could have only been done by someone belonging to both traditions like Tran Anh Hung.

and moral' Vietnamese women the carriers of traditional Vietnamese culture; therefore, by making Thu strongly Western-influenced, he is stating that he considers her to be a frivolous and immoral woman. The imminent break between Thu and Khuyen is symbolized by the rupture of the vase she gave him:

> Thu: Where's the vase I gave you?
>
> Khuyen: It's broken.
>
> Thu: Broken? You mean: She broke it. If I say she did it on purpose, what would your answer be?

The film director sexualizes Mui by using a close up of her while she washes. The servant is transformed into a highly desirable sexual object upon which the viewer spies. The exotic way in which Tran Anh Hung frames the adult Mui can be seen as very sexist and patronizing. Mui is presented more like the object of desire rather than the object. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the spectator is the subject that gazes at the object - in this case represented by Mui- of desire. The spectator being the beholder of the gaze establishes the desire to look at the pleasurable scene. The viewer, according to Metz (1975), therefore became voyeuristically positioned. This voyeuristic attitude derives from the spectators' pleasurable gazing upon a female body: the way in which the audience's gaze fixes the woman and makes her the object of desire; the spectator fetishises her. By fixing the woman body in a male perception, the woman has no control over her body. Mui's body is highly sexualized and exoticized. The director portrays the Vietnamese woman in a manner that has strong affinities with the Orientalist discourse on the female body. The viewer is invited to identify the Vietnamese female as a woman whose main purpose is to satisfy men, and who is therefore denied her own identity and subjectivity.

When Mui washes there is green light reflecting on her body which symbolizes that, despite being an adult, she has not been sexually initiated. Mui is often framed from the outside of the visual space she is in giving the sensation that the audience's gaze is constantly, and voyeuristically, intruding into her space. Thu's 'Western' sexuality is freely expressed (she grabs Khuyen while playing piano and bring him to his bedroom), while Mui's is concealed and revealed by daily gestures taking the form of domestic chores. While Thu can be in control of her sexuality and construct her identity as a free woman, Mui can only articulate her sensuality by preparing good meals for Khuyen and look after his house. The director certainly privileges the "Oriental" approach in having Mu have her identity shaped by male desire. Furthermore, as Rosenbrun (1994) explains:

> Again in the press material, Tran contrasts the mutual seduction of Mui and Khuyen with what he calls seduction American style, where "a man and a woman meet and immediately there is a power struggle". Here, he contends, "Two Asiatics who are attracted to each other brush up against each other, create chance encounters where they'll have the opportunity to meet again until, little by little, they become indispensable to each other. Slowly, always very slowly." But the absence of any overt power struggle doesn't mean that power plays no role in the seduction, and a certain romanticizing of traditional sexist roles seems central to this episode (Rosebrun: 1994).

The Westernized style promoted by Thu is reflected in the typical continental breakfast Mui prepares Khuyen and his girlfriend. Mui is rather fascinated by the Western accessories worn by Thu and she tries on one of the stiletto pumps that have been abandoned in Khuyen's living room on the return from their night out. Tran Anh Hung juxtaposes the shots of the Western breakfast and the stiletto with ones portraying a painting of a Vietnamese woman wearing traditional clothes. These shots represent Mui's delicacy starkly contrasted with Western manners. Mui is tempted by Western manners and taste, but opts to

keep her traditional Vietnamese feminity. This obedience to Confucian roles is what, for the director, makes Mui sensual and seductive. To emphasize Mui's finesse, the background music is, again, Claude Debussy's *Au Claire de Lune*. The viewers begin to understand Khuyen's interesest in Mui when he sees similarities between Mui's face and the one sculpted on a Buddha's statue. The music composer starts making drawings of it, which Mui finds in one of his bedroom's drawers. Khuyen's interest in the servant further arises when she sees her wearing a red *ao doi* and trying red lipstick on herself. Mui runs away, trying to avoid the young man as he starts chasing her. The transgressive nature of Thu is further manifested when she touches Khuyen's head:

> *I wander what percentage of women in Vietnam has ever touched their fiancés' heads. My mother told me that before they used to teach girls that well educated women should never do it.* [58]

During Thu's visit Khuyen expresses his frustrations and anxieties by playing Frederic Chopin's Prelude number 24. Khuyen after finishing playing the piano, and having drawn more portraits of Mui goes to see her in her bedroom. The extradietic sounds of the insects' recreates the sensual and copulating noises of the jungle at night. Thu in discovering Mui's portraits expresses her frustrations with the servant. Khuyen's girlfriend, in a very western style, destroys some of his possessions. Thu restrains her anger when sees in a mirror the reflection of a painting of a traditional Vietnamese woman next to her. The woman seems to recognize that she has, in her Western manners, transgressed, making Khuyen run away from her. She leaves in Khuyen's house her engagement ring; Khuyen happily puts this away in his pocket. Khuyen then goes to Mui's room to give her a yellow book which teaches people how to read. Teaching Mui how to read is a sign of her empowerment, Vietnamese

[58] The Vietnamese regard the human head as the seat of life and therefore highly personal. Invading the surface of the head is often seen as frightening because it could provide escape for the life's essence.

peasants were illiterate. However, Mui is able to become Khueyn's partner by showing the typical submission traits shown by traditional Vietnamese women. As the director further explains in an interview:

> Cineaste: Do you see this film as feminist?
>
> Tran: Many people think so. But many people think the opposite. What I know is my view on it. Certainly in making this film I was with the women but showing their sacrifice and, on the other hand, the abuses of the men. Certainly, the women suffer. What I don't want to do in this film is to propose a solution. I am not suggesting that these women suddenly join some struggle for women's liberation because I don't fully believe that they, in particular, should do. I don't believe it is for us to say to such women, 'Everything that you have lived up to now is an error.' You can't vindicate yourself by accepting a new model of womanhood.
>
> Maybe later I will make a film like that, but right now I felt that it was more important to establish a base that would allow us to understand and respect these women. I see my mother as a person of great spirituality, but that spirituality is linked to her sacrifice. I didn't want to make a film like *Raise the Red Lantern*. Films like that go in one direction- everything is bad, nothing in your past counts, and so on. I wanted to show something else. I didn't want a film that said nothing about a past and a tradition which, in itself, is beautiful and strong. I wanted to show the ambiguity which I felt was a more exact reflection of life (Cross: 1993).

The Scent of Green Papaya (1993) is Tran Anh Hung's cinematic homage to his mother. In this case, the diasporic film director is engaged in the incarnation of his experiences, his real and fictive narratives and identities, typical of what Naficy (2001) defined as accented cinema, expressed through filmic representation.

The first time the spectators hear Mui reading she says: "In my garden there's a papaya tree. The papaya hang in bunches. The ripe papaya have a pale yellow colour. The ripe papaya are sweet with a sugary taste." The film director makes cross references between

what Mui is reading and what Mui has become. From a young girl she has matured into a woman. From a house predominantly green in color, she moved to one where yellow is the dominant one. However, Mui is framed by handling a green papaya and playing with its unripe seeds placing one in a bowl of water over other plants. The image alludes to Mui's still to come sexual initiation. The following shots are out of focus and contain images of Mui having a sex with Khuyen. The audience is presented with some yellow out of focus images. These shots represent Mui's full maturity and transformation into womanhood. In the final shots of the film, she is framed wearing a bright yellow *ao doi* and pregnant, reading fluently from a book, with a smiling statue standing over her.

The Scent of Green Papaya (1993) is a film entirely shot in Vietnamese (there exist subtitles in various languages and one edition dubbed into French). The actors in the film are mostly non professionals, apart from Anh Hoa Nguyen interpreting Ti. Tran Anh Hung explains that directing the actors was a challenging task:

> That was very complex. First of all, it's very difficult to find Vietnamese actors. The Vietnamese are, by nature, a gentle people, and also to be an actor is not considered to be a good thing. It's not considered a serious thing, to be in cinema. Once I found my actors, I had to work with them on a whole system of rediscovery of a "typical Vietnamese gesture" (Chua: 1994)

The film maker wanted his actors to embody Vietnamese. By this, he is acknowledging that French-Vietnamese cannot be considered carriers of 'pure' Vietnamese identity. Their 'Vietnameseness' has been corrupted by the French environment. Tran Anh Hung's attempt to recreate what he defined as a "mental' Viet Nam, is a way of making his hybrid French-Vietnamese identity more Vietnamese. The conflicting identities, Vietnamese culture blended with Western customs, are embodied by the male characters and by Thu. These subjects

express the split nature of Tran Anh Hung's own hybrid subjectivity. The conflicting feelings felt by the male characters are healed by the family unit. The female characters, except Thu, are the ones charged with keeping the family united and harmonious.

Cyclo (Xích lô) (1995)

Tran Anh Hung's second feature film is *Cyclo* (1995). It was shot in Viet Nam, mainly in the former Saigon and in the surrounding countryside. The film was produced by various French and Vietnamese companies: Canal+, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Cofimage 5, Cofimage 6, Giai Phong Film Studio, La Sept Cinéma, Les Productions Lazennec, Lumière, Salon Films, and Société Française de Production (SFP). The principal actors are non-professional Le Van Loc (playing the title role), Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Chiu Wai (the only cast member of non-Vietnamese ancestry), and Tran Nu Yên-Khê (the director's wife). With its filmic style- particularly the emphasis on close-up shots and on images rather than dialogue- the film, in common with other French-Vietnamese productions, is certainly targeting an art-house audience. Crow (1996) argues that "Stylistically, Cyclo is more informed by art house films of Europe and the Americas than by Vietnamese mainstream cinema." Henderson (2004) also comments on the strong visual appeal offered by the film making Cyclo (1994) an art-house film: "[...] at the very least, Tran's emphasis on visual flourishes (such as an out-of-nowhere burned-out helicopter showing up in the middle of a roundabout intersection or the volcanic blood rivers that spring from slashed pigs in the slaughterhouse) functions as a unique and oddly beautiful visual blush [...]" (Henderson: 2004).

The film tells the story of a young bicycle taxi driver and his family in which the former, as a consequence of having his three-wheeled bicycle stolen, is forced to join a criminal gang. His older sister is then dragged into prostitution by her brother's gang boss. *Cyclo* (1995) narrates the vicissitudes and loss of innocence of the bicycle taxi driver and his older sister in Ho Chi Minh City's criminal world. None of the characters are known by their

first name. Tran Anh Hung addresses them by using generic names, such as the Cyclo to name the three-wheeled taxi driver, and nicknames, such as the Poet, to refer to the head of the criminal gang. The film was shot in a neo-realist style, with, as mentioned above, the actor playing Cyclo being the only non-professional involved. The choice of casting an inexperienced individual to play this role was not done for budgetary reason, but to give the audience the authenticity of a Vietnamese character with an awareness of Ho Chi Minh City and its underground culture. The shots framing Cyclo cycling in Ho Chi Minh were made by hiding the camera on a van. The film director wanted to give a realistic view of the Vietnamese metropolis' traffic congestion. The audience sees and feels the chaos and pollution of Ho Chi Minh City.

Most of the film was shot in Cholon, the poorest district of Ho Chi Minh City, and the area which most recalls the French and American invasions. The Poet's apartment set was built on the wasteland of Cholon (Orr: 1998). Cholon, in both Western- *The Lover* (*L'Amant*) (1992) - and Vietnamese films- *Collective Flat* (*Chung Cu*) (1999) - has been the setting for cinematic productions. The district was the Chinese area of colonial Viet Nam. Its landscape is characterized by colonial architecture, both influenced by the French invasion (1880s-1840s) and the American presence during the American-Vietnamese conflict (1960s-1970s). Cholon contains both the nostalgic feeling of a colonial Viet Nam, and, at the same time, the crude face of the Vietnamese capitalistic era.

Derderian (2003) has argued that the overseas Vietnamese were shocked by seeing the former Saigon being filled with Western influences. The Vietnamese diaspora perceived Viet Nam as unchanged by time, both culturally and structurally. Tran Anh Hung's film *Cyclo* (1995) is a response to the urban space and culture that the film director had to face when he

returned to Viet Nam. Tran Anh Hung's feelings of loss and disturbance are expressed in the violence, the fragmentation, and the poverty that the Ho Chi Minh City's underclass has to confront on daily basis. As the director says:

> When I went back to Vietnam, people said to me, "What are you feeling being back in the country, being in contact with this?" And what I said to them was, "Nothing. I'm feeling nothing." Of course, that was false. That's what I felt would be the subject for the next film. It will be the story of a young 18-year-old cyclopousse driver. I want to present, through the cycles of his life, the difficulty that people have living in Vietnam today: the exhaustion that they have through their work; the fascination, on the other hand, that they have with the dollar and the presence of Americans, in spite of the embargo. That's going to be the social thematic of the film [...] (Chua: 1994).

The early 1990s was the period in which Viet Nam went through its economic renovation. Ho Chi Minh City was upfront in becoming a global city embracing the global capitalistic market. The inhabitants of Ho Chi Minh City responded with eagerness to the prospect of becoming private investors and joining business with foreign investors. The Government struggled to keep control over the vibrant economy, corruption was unrestrained. Illegal activity was rapidly growing in Ho Chi Minh City (Forbes: 1999). Poverty was also higher than before and people were struggling to survive. One of the few legal occupations for the working classes and for former Southern Vietnamese Army soldiers, was to become a bicycle taxi driver. At the same time, Viet Nam experienced rapid expansion of the drug business. The narcotic commerce is a continuation of the trade started in the 1960s and 1970s during the American-Vietnamese war (Forbes: 1999). The globalization of Vietnamese society is also manifested by the dollar's being used for transactions.

The globalization and its impact upon Ho Chi Minh City urban and social structure are portrayed in the film in the most cynical way possible. The main characters belong to the lower classes or criminal underworld. Cholon is an area under the control of criminal gangs; there are killers, pimps, drug dealers and prostitutes. The film director also indicates that rich Vietnamese consumers are the main beneficiaries of the illegal services to be found here, and so are responsible for their existence. Tran Anh Hung does not directly frame the external environment of Ho Chi Minh City; this is mostly represented by off-screen events (Forbes: 1999). 'Globalization at its worst' is reflected in the violent and idiosyncratic relationships that each character has with the others. In *Cyclo* (1995), the family unit is the major sufferer of this apocalyptic vision of globalization. The film starts with a close up of Cyclo's face, while he is pedaling on Cholon's main street. The diegetic sounds of horns and traffic give the audience the feeling of chaos and pollution. An extradiegetic voice, belonging to Cyclo's father, gives the audience information about the hard, painful, and unrewarding life that bicycle taxi drivers have to go through in life:

> My son, our family, owes a lot to the cyclo taxi. We work hard, day and night. Eating and sleeping in the street; pedaling all the time. Some mornings, the backaches nail you to the bed. I don't know where it all leads. This has been my life. When I die, I'll have nothing to leave you. If you can, see if you can find something more worthy.

The film director does not give the audience any hope for the poor life endured by the Cyclo. The medium shot in which he is framed, with all the traffic at his back making Cyclo's movements appear very fragile in the dangerous traffic, and his tired face, deprive the spectator of any sense of optimism towards the bicycle taxi driver.

> Cyclo: *Look again and see if I'm right.*

Cyclo's friend: *The People's Committee makes loans. In line with the policy of fighting poverty.*

Cyclo: *Where is it? Show me.*

Tran Anh Hung gives the spectators the background information characteristic of Vietnamese life in Ho Chi Minh City during the 1990s. The Cyclo cleans up and goes to the People's Committee's office in order to apply for a job. During the interview the official has with the Cyclo the audience gets to know both the film main character and the straining environment of the Vietnamese lower orders. While the officer is purely interested in completing the form, Cyclo wants to let him know how poor he and his family are:

Officer: *How old are you?*

Cyclo: *Eighteen.*

Officer: *Parents' occupation?*

Cyclo: *We're very poor.*

Officer: *Answer me, your parents?*

Cyclo: *My mother died in childbirth. My father too, an accident...*

Officer: *How did he die?*

Cyclo: *A truck...he died instantly, with two passengers.*

Officer: *At Hang Xanh intersection, right?"*

Cyclo: *Yes.*

Officer: *Who's left?*

Cyclo: *My grandfather, my sisters. They study in the morning and work in the afternoon.*

Officer: *What do they do?*

Cyclo: *The eldest delivers water to the market, the little one shines shoes.*

Officer: *And your grandfather?*

Cyclo: *He repairs tires.*

Officer: *Who rents you the taxi?*

Cyclo: *The boss lady in Cholon.*

Officer: *Her name?*

Cyclo: *I don't know.*

Officer: *How much per day?*

Cyclo: *5.000 dongs.*

Officer: *And the deposit?*

Cyclo: *200.000 dongs.*

Officer: *Ok, we'll consider your file. We'll let you know*

Tran Anh Hung, first of all, makes sure the viewer is well-informed about the fragmentation of Cyclo's familial unit. Both of his parents were killed suddenly. The audience is also informed of the informal jobs that Cyclo's surrogate family has to perform in order to earn a living. Additionally, the viewers become aware of the potential unreliability of Cyclo's Madam by the fact he does not know her name and by the way he addresses her. The nameless characters are also an indication that the misery experienced by them is a crisis experienced by every individual having the same place in Vietnamese society. The viewer captures the detrimental nature of Vietnamese globalization through the life of the film's characters.

The viewer also knows that the Cyclo will not receive any loan. The People's Committee's office has piles of files stuck on the floor. Cyclo's application will not be considered. The young man will spend the rest of his life being entangled in a poor and hopeless condition. While Mui, in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), was able to move across classes, Cyclo will not become part of class mobility. Tran Anh Hung, instead of a mental image of Viet Nam, comes to terms here with the crude reality of Ho Chi Minh City. The fragmented and brutal experiences of Vietnamese life that Tran Anh Hung experiences on his return to Viet Nam has disenchanted the film director away from his former mental construction of his homeland. The film director's awakening to such conditions is reflected in

the neo-realist style he uses throughout the film. Cholon, and its harsh urban reality, is the background where the film characters operate. The choice of using real locations is in complete contrast to the oneiric and mental space Tran Anh Hung recreated in the studios of Bry-sur-Marne. The visual production of the sense impression of pollution, chaos and sweat portrayed by the film director translates in the viewer as physical sensations of oppression, filthiness, and dampness. Ho Chi Minh's frenetic life style is shown by focusing, in close-up, on Cyclo while carrying different passengers, and the monetary transaction between him and his clients. The close-up and fluidity with which Tran Anh Hung frames the money being passed from hand to hand, is an indication of the hectic life of a cyclo taxi driver in Ho Chi Minh City.

The frantic sensations end when Cyclo stops for his lunch and where he meets others cyclopousse. The place where they eat is surrounded by bamboo trees and the extradiegetic sounds of birds. It gives the audience a sense of freshness, calmness and relaxation. The close-up on the food, especially on the moisture on the glasses containing cold drinks, gives the audience an idea of sensorial peace. However, the sense of calmness and tranquillity conveyed by the surrounding space conflicts with the conversation the bicycle taxi driver has with other (unnamed) drivers:

These days it hurts when I piss. What about you?

Me too. It burns.

You've got to drinks it helps.

It makes you sweat, wears you out.

A doctor warned me, take anything to build muscles, you end up impotent.

Yeah, right! Who can afford a doctor? Better to see a butcher.

Tran Anh Hung constructs his characters' narrative by making the cyclo taxi drivers reiterate their poor economic conditions and deprived lives. The viewer is always reminded of the unprivileged and lowly position that these young males, belonging to the Ho Chi Minh underclass, have to tolerate. However, the bicycle taxi drivers talk about their misery in a very serene, and sometimes humorous, way. The purpose of this is to relate to the audience, that in spite of Vietnam's troubled history and present, the Vietnamese have been able to preserve their serenity and precious Vietnamese culture.

A Vietnamese restaurant, full of people enjoying their lunch, is used as background to introduce Cyclo's younger sister. While everyone is sitting down and enjoying dinner at their tables, the girl is framed shining the shoes of the restaurant's clients. Her expression is tired and alienated. The younger sister is framed cleaning shoes with two other young Vietnamese boys. Tran Anh Hung constantly reminds the viewers that the deprivation undergone by Cyclo, his sisters, grandfather, and colleagues applies to the majority of Vietnamese urban lower classes who, nonetheless, mostly retain dignity.

The first sight the viewer has of the older sister is her delivering water at the Cholon market. Interestingly, compared with her sibling, the older sister does not look "Vietnamese".[59] She smiles while carrying heavy water at the market, her facial expression being more one of submission than of fatigue. The French-Vietnamese actress, compared with the Vietnamese born non-professional actors, is alien to the "real" Vietnamese life and is unable to interpret it with much credibility. She acts as if she is a modern version of the surrendering Mui in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993).

[59] Tran Nu Yên-Khê is a French-Vietnamese actress.

The figure of 'the servant' in the film is filled by Cyclo himself. The bicycle taxi driver spends his day waiting for people to be transported around Ho Chi Minh City. He is at the service of people, and when he transgresses the area where he is supposed to working, he is violently told-off by rival bicycle taxi drivers' gangs:

> Cyclo driver: *How dare you steal our clients?*
>
> Cyclo: *It's her...*
>
> Cyclo driver: *This is our turf. If you want to live, get lost! Beat it, you're on turf.*

Cyclo (1995) represents the violence and deprivation of Ho Chi Minh City in the microcosmos of people's lives. Tran Anh Hung has shifted substantially in his ideas of what Vietnamese are supposed to look like between *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) and *Cyclo* (1995).

Cyclo's boss Lady is introduced while sitting in her studio, with her handicapped son lying on her lap while gasping like a fish. He has blue paint on his hair. The boss Lady is shown as being both a caring mother, caressing her son's head, and as representing a cruel and bloodthirsty chief: "*Yes, you are my little fish.... So, how much*?[60]" The boss Lady is framed as having knowledge of the criminal life of Cholon:

> Cyclo: *The thugs took a passenger from me.*
>
> Boss Lady: *Careful, each turf has its gangs.*

Tran Anh Hung makes the boss Lady tell Cyclo about the mental deficiency of her son. "*He was born that way, he must be your age.*" Tran Anh Hung starts informing the viewer that the

[60] Referring to Cyclo's daily earnings.

boss Lady and the Cyclo are going to have further connections in the narrative. The ambivalent personality, a mix of maternal love and viciousness, of the boss Lady is reflected in the way she looks after her male employees:

> Lady Boss talking to Tooth, one of her gang members with a toothache: *Take care of your tooth.*
>
> Knife, Tooth's co-worker: *You see, I told you.*
>
> Boss Lady: *Ok, that's enough. Get out.*

The power that the boss Lady exerts on her workers is shown to be in contrast to the powerlessness of Cyclo's older sister. The film director, by choosing a female character to interpret the role of the bad and powerful, is empowering women. In Viet Nam women are subordinated to men. However, in the film, men are subservient to the boss Lady; she knows how to control and order them around. Having such powerful feminine figure also implies that, for the director, Vietnamese Confucian traditional rules have been, or are in the process of being, overturned in modern Viet Nam, but that this is not entirely a positive development.

The moral corruption, high status, and power of the boss Lady is shown by her cigarette consumption. Smoking in Viet Nam is considered to be unfeminine, and therefore smoking is an activity performed by non virtuous women. On the contrary, smoking is considered to be a manly activity that reinforces male unity, social power and position (Pham, Do, Truong, Jenkins: 1995). Therefore, by smoking, the boss Lady shows her masculine attitude towards life and capability to control males.

Cyclo's grandfather works on the street repairing bicycle tires. Cyclo, after he finishes his evening shift, goes to collect him and bring the grandfather home. Cyclo's family lives in a very small alley, in a two room house behind a barber shop. The spectators can feel the

claustrophobic sensation of the narrowness of the Cholon alleys. As soon as the two males return home, the film director frames Cyclo's sister preparing dinner. The two men give the older sister all the money they earned during the day. The film director, at this point, frames- using medium shots- the sister cooking some fish in a wok. The younger sister is busy washing vegetables. Tran Anh Hung make the older sister act as a surrogate mother for the family, she is in charge to look after everyone. For the director, Vietnamese women are the ones who maintain unity and harmony within the family

> Older sister: Bring tobacco for grandfather. Is your shoulder better?
>
> Grandfather: It gets worse every day.

The grandfather is stuck in the same circumstances that do not allow any of the Ho Chi Minh underclass to hope for a better life. Despite being poor, the grandfather is an honest man with a very high morality: the kind of moral commitment Vietnamese traditional culture imparted over people. The director emphasizes here that Confucian patriarchal values are still to be considered to be the basis of a moral Vietnamese family, even in a, in some respects, rapidly changing society:

> Cyclo: *Grandfather, take the scale they sent us by mistake and change job. It'll be easier. See how is done. Someone comes, you wipe. You invite him to try, 1000 dongs per person.*
>
> Grandfather: *We shouldn't. The scale isn't ours.*
>
> Older sister: *Yes, we can, we've waited long enough. No one has claimed it. You shoulder's hurting. You can't keep pumping tires.*
>
> Grandfather: *Let's wait a while.*

While the conversation between the grandfather, Cyclo and the older sister takes place, the audience sees close-up shots of the older sister while cooking. While the other family

members look tired and resigned to their destiny, she has a fresh and tranquil look that seems to clash with the lives of the other film's characters. However, the film director by framing her performing domestic chores, with pleasure, gives the audience the feeling that she is a virtuous woman. At the same time, her passive attitude, transforms her into an object more than a subject of the narrative. The way in which Tran Anh Hung shoots the older sister is highly voyeuristic. Again, he is portraying the Vietnamese female as an exotic object at the mercy of men. It seems the director's hybrid identity has, in some respects, space for a traditional concept of Vietnamese womanhood.

The place where Cyclo's family lives, despite its chaotic space, has a quiet ambience. Here, we perceive extradiegetic sounds of crickets and diegetic sounds of the frizzling of the food being cooked. The film director places strong importance on food. It is used to define women's moral standards: good females are in the kitchen preparing food for their families. For instance, the viewer is never presented with the boss Lady in the kitchen. She orders her servants to prepare food, but she is never involved in its arrangement herself. She feeds her mentally impaired son, but she never makes herself the food she consumes. Moreover, Cyclo's family's only chance to spend time together is during breakfast and dinner. Food has, for the director, the function of reuniting Vietnamese families, of bonding them together.[61] While the audience thinks that the evening meal brings the characters to finish their working

[61] Following is an extract from an interview made by a Vietnamese journalist to the newly crowned Miss Universe Viet Nam. In the interview Hong asks the winner about the importance of sharing food with her family:

Hong: "Do you think taking meals with one's family is important in everyday life?"
Bui Thi Phuong Thanh: "I think family meals are very important. Meals are the times in the day when all members of my family gather to talk about the day. Thanks to the family meal, I know how hard my father tries to support the family and how my mother prepares meals to take care of her beloved family. It helps us understand each other much better while sharing both our happiness and sadness" (Hong: 2008). This is an example that shows how food, and its consumption, is central to the making and unity of the Vietnamese family.

day, Tran Anh Hung surprises them by showing that cyclo, and his sisters work at night too. The director is painting a portrait of modern Viet Nam as itself hybridized of Western and traditional values, and that this has not been a positive experience for the country. In spite of capitalistic growth, the poor have not benefited from this, and are as poor as ever. The dignity they maintain is through clinging to traditional values.

While Cyclo is pedaling in the traffic, Tran Anh Hung frames the life of families in a concrete block of flats typical of the Communist era. The film director shot the block of flats at night. All the apartments, from the outside, look the same. The windows, in the block, that the film director choses to frame are mostly kitchens. The green neon light shining in the flats makes the location looking very aseptic and alien like. However, inside of the monotonous structure of the building, every family is living its own life. Each of them differs significantly from the other. The film director shoots people teaching classes, studying, hanging up the laundry, praying, and eating. Tran Anh Hung focuses his attention, using a close-up, on a father, his young son and wife, while eating together. The two men are having a typical Vietnamese lunch consisting of rice and side dishes. They are a poor family and they are eating sitting on the floor. They maintain dignity, even in this rapacious economic climate, through the consumption of traditional Vietnamese food. Food links them to an older, more stable Viet Nam. It enables them to incorporate something traditional that, in the modern city, appears to be rapidly disappearing. The camera wanders through the various apartments and frames people, in their poverty and alienating life, performing their daily activities. These individuals do not make any sound. The audience hears extradietic music, characterized by the lack of a motif, which gives an enigmatic feeling: the feeling that the Vietnamese are being alienated by the new system which seems to be trying to remove them from their traditional culture.

The film director abruptly cuts the shot by framing the older sister working in a restaurant and roasting some meat. A few shots link the urban area where the sister is working as cook, to the one where Cyclo works. The camera moves from the kitchen, to the outside of the restaurant, where Cyclo is passing by. Two crippled men each with one of their legs missing enter the restaurant to play some music in the hope the customers will give them some spare change. They sing a Vietnamese song nostalgic of their youth. The younger sister is framed polishing shoes on the restaurant's door step. Next to her there is another boy cleaning shoes, another one, exhausted is sleeping next to them. The soft music played by the crippled men is in direct contrast to the deafening music "Just like you", a mix of hard rock, funk, and post punk musical genres by the Rollins Band in the next scene. The scene takes place in a discotheque full of young people, very Western-mannered in the way they dress and behave. Cyclo is there because has to drive The Poet back home. He is in a hyperactive state caused by the abuse of alcohol and use of drugs. Tran Anh Hung frames The Poet dancing frantically while the Rolling Band is screaming repeatedly "Rage!" The Poet faints outside the discotheque, while the extradiegetic "Just like You" ends. The synchronism between the raging state of The Poet and the song verses works perfectly together. It makes the viewers feel the anger The Poet feels within himself. The purpose of this scene is to emphasise that the Poet is a product of the capitalist system. However, he yearns to get back to his 'innocent years' where his identity was not fragmented and was just 'Vietnamese'.

Late at night, Cyclo's family is reunited again to go to sleep. The space in the bedroom is small and gives a claustrophobic sensation. The older sister is framed while rocking her grandfather's hammock. Her gestures always show care, grace, and attention towards everything she does. She is the one who wakes up her family in the morning and prepares them breakfast. Tran Anh Hung continues to frame the older sister with close-ups

while cooking. She performs her domestic duties with an extreme unnatural pleasure. The older sister represents the idealized traditional Vietnamese woman whose life duty is to satisfy the needs of her family, especially the male components of it. The character of the older sister pleases the Western male imagination. She is the quintessence of the "Oriental" woman. Tran Anh Hung's split identity, Vietnamese ancestry mixed with French culture, is reflected in the way she portrays the older sister. The film director partially sees Viet Nam through the "Orientalist" narrative that France still, to some degree, has towards its former colony. Therefore, Tran Anh Hung, particularly in his portrayal of Vietnamese women, uses views that concentrate on male visual pleasure. As Lewis (2004) points out:

> I agree with many scholars in the field who argue that the dominant codes of Orientalist art prioritize male visual pleasure and that this is bound up in the construction of imperial identities and the subjective investment in imperial power relations (Nochlin 1983, Richon 1985, Tawadros, 1988 cited in Lewis 2004).

Lewis (2004) argues that Western women, also, were consumers and producers of the "Orientalised" women's bodies. Therefore both male and female spectators, whose gaze, in Western cinema, is directed at the female body through male eyes, find the older sister an "Oriental" object of pleasure. The older sister, like the older Mui, in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (2005), becomes an object that is explored through voyeuristic pleasure. Mui and the older sister's stylized movements help the spectator to "Orientalize" the two women even more strongly than the mere gaze does.

In spite of the chaotic space in Cyclo's home, the film director makes the viewer feel that the familial house is a safe and tranquil environment. The extradietic and diegetic sounds are homely noises, and natural sounds such as the crickets' chirping, associated with the

Vietnamese fauna. Cyclo's family house overlooks a river with a lush vegetation. In contrast, the urban public space of Ho Chi Minh City is a constant pollution of traffic sounds. It is in Ho Chi Minh's urban jungle that Cyclo gets robbed of his bicycle taxi. The deafening, diegetic, noise of a pneumatic drill covers the sounds of the criminal gang that steals his cyclo. When Cyclo runs towards the thieves no one helps him. The criminals, with no reasons, stop to hit Cyclo. The viewers are hit with a strong sense of alienation[62] in psychological and Marxist terms. The sense of solitude that the scene communicates is a reflection of the globalized fragmented Vietnamese society. The street where the accident takes place is crowded: everyone observes and, at the same time, ignores the act of crude violence. The people driving the vehicles are annoyed by the presence of Cyclo on the road. They keep beeping at him to free the passage. The act of violence Cyclo suffers is the event that drags him into becoming a criminal. The bicyle taxi driver goes to the lady Boss to report the loss of the cyclo. The film director frames her singing a lullaby for her mentally impaired son:

If I, the Heron, die by boiling

May it be in clear water

To ease my children's suffering.

Bom has a fan made of palm leaves

The Rich Man says, I'll trade you

Three cows and nine buffalo

I don't want your buffalo

I'll give you

A pond full of fish

I don't want your fish

[62] Tran Anh Hung wants to make Cyclo estranged from Vietnamese society. At the same time, the film director wants to show how the worker, in this instance Cyclo, in the new Vietnamese capitalist market loses his identification with the product of his labour. Therefore, Cyclo feels controlled and exploited.

I'll give you

A raft of precious wood

I don't want you wood

I'll give you a bird...

The lullaby, dealing with suffering and trading, is an insight into the future life of Cyclo. The woman will make Cyclo pay, through criminal activities, for the cycle that he lost. Cyclo is taken to a dismantled flat he is going to occupy until he is directly involved in the illegal activities. The cyclo driver is deprived form wandering the streets. He is isolated from the world by the enclosed space beyond which he is not allowed to trespass, except for eating. However, the isolation he has to endure, paradoxically, brings him closer to the streets than ever. The flat where he is staying is not tranquil like Cyclo's home: we hear a constant din of city traffic.

The ambivalent, dualistic character of the Poet, much like the dual side of the lady Boss, is expressed by the way he looks after Cyclo. The head of the gang is concerned the bicycle taxi driver has not enough money to buy food and gives him some. Tran Anh Hung often frames the Poet while smoking. Handling cigarettes make him look masculine and accentuate his leading status, the confidence and power he has over people. The audience discovers that the Poet is involved in prostitution too. There are two prostitutes handing him the money they have earned during the night out. However, the Poet's flat is a bohemian and beautiful house in Cholon. There is no sound heavy traffic noise, and, instead we hear the extradiegetic sound of birds singing. The double nature of Lady Boss and the Poet represents their liminal identity: between Vietnamese traditional culture and Western capitalist culture. The film director expresses his own identity through these characters. The Poet's flat is

furnished in both a traditional and Western style, further reinforcing the character's (and director's) liminal identity.

Tran Anh Hung surprises the audience by having the older sister going to his flat. Tran Anh Hung does not give any hint as to why the woman is called to his flat. However, the viewer discovers that she is there to prostitute herself. The older sister is very submissive to the Poet. "*I came because you wanted me to.*" The gangster does not pay attention to the tears and the desperation of the older sister. However, his ambivalent nature, both cruel and protective, is shown when he violently tells her client: "*Don't touch her. It's her first time.*" The Poet spies, from a window, on the treatment that the older sister's client gives her. The client forces the woman to perform acts of an explicit sexual nature against her will. The violence inflicted over the older sister is highly disturbing to watch. The claustrophobic and hopeless situation she finds herself in is the equivalent of witnessing a woman being raped. The film director imposes on the film audience the vicious and immoral nature of the woman's client. The Vietnamese female is relentlessly presented as being at the service of the male. Particularly, the director portrays the older sister as a victim of merciless modern capitalism. However, it seems that, for the female, she is at the mercy of circumstances in both traditional and modern Viet Nam. The violence towards Cyclo's sister is not justified, and appears to be portrayed for the mere pleasure of showing violence:

> Question: In several scenes, there seems to be a joy in the way you constructed and choreographed violence.
>
> Tran Anh Hung: If violence got you off the mental track, then you went the wrong way. Violence should be examined with a cold eye; it's the only way not to get sucked in. When I went to Vietnam to cast the film, I met old women who told me the horrors they have lived during the war. The strangest thing was they were discussing it with a smile of extraordinary serenity and sweetness. One of them

> even listed the menu of tortures she had gone through during the wars- and she's known both wars, the French war and the American war. It's was that sweetness that gave me the idea to try and make the film with the same serenity. If you're not turned on by violence, you'll notice it is depicted with an overlay of sweetness; only through that contrast does violence become unbearable (Behar: 1995).

The violence that Vietnamese women had to endure during the wars was atrocious. However, during wars women are victims of such despicable actions. The gratuity of violence the older sister gets trapped in is unexplainable. That is the reason why the acts she is impelled to commit becomes so disquieting to watch. Such behavior is totally unexpected by the viewers. Tran Anh Hung is very successful at making the spectator feel disconcerted. The Poet seems to suffer in watching what the older sister is subjected to. His nose bleeds, as it often did when he was young, and he holds his handkerchief on his mouth as he is sobbing. Part of the younger Poet's innocence is still alive in him.

The client is a Vietnamese rich man; the film director acknowledges his wealth to the viewer because he hands the older sister a bottle of *Evian*[63] water to drink. Evian bottled water is a symbol of the capitalist economy, and globalization, taking place in Viet Nam. Drinking *Evian* water give its consumers the feeling they are part of the globalized world. To some extent, one can say that consuming such water brand gives Vietnamese rich people the feeling that French food gave its colonized the associations with. In contrast, the bottled water used by the gangsters and which Cyclo is forced to drink is a Vietnamese brand. Tran Anh Hung sees this hybridization of Vietnamese culture, as he shown in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), as a process eroding traditional Vietnamese culture and the honorable customs associated with it. The film director perceives Vietnamese traditional values as being pure.

---

[63] Evian water is very expensive to buy in Viet Nam.

When Cyclo performs his first criminal task, the viewers are aware of his "pure' soul because he comes across and wants to save a man wanting to drown himself, although his boss stops him. The Poet goes to visit Cyclo and brings him four pomelos and two gold fish. His assistants Tooth and Knife hand him these presents in a violently choreographed way. They throw him the pomelos and cut the bag the fish are in with a flick knife. Knife: "*People are singing your praise. You are a Samaritan. You tried to save a drowning man.*"

The criminal makes fun of Cyclo for his morality towards other humans. Knife hands him money the lady Boss gives him for performing his first illicit task well. She wants him to work as a criminal; however Cyclo refuses. The bicycle taxi driver's nature is so far removed from the brutality of Ho Chi Minh City criminality that he refuses to acknowledge he is stuck in a delinquent life. He represents an older, more gentle, Viet Nam that the director wants to emphasise even, indeed especially, if it is undergoing rapid change. The Poet is never involved in the physical or verbal hostility towards Cyclo and his older sister. The head of the gang passively observes Knife and Tooth's brutality. Cyclo's refusal to work for his boss ends up with him being force fed with poisoned water. Cyclo vomits his lunch, consisting of rice noodles, in order to expel the toxicant water. The vomiting of the rice noodle soup the bicycle driver was eating represents his forced rejection towards the Vietnamese traditional values he was holding on to. The Poet consoles him by stroking his head. While he acts in such comforting way towards Cyclo, he mentally recites a poem:

Nameless river
I was born sobbing
Blue sky, vast earth
Black stream water
I grow with the months,

the years

With no one to watch over me

Nameless is the man

Nameless is the river

Colorless the flower

Perfume

Without a voice

O, river! O, passer-by

In the close cycle

Of the months, the years

I can't forget my debt to my roots

And I wonder

Through words

Towards my land.

The poetry is an allusion to the sense of isolation he feels and the alienation he feels from his family, but, also, the desire he has to go back to them and thank his parents for his upbringing. Blum-Reid (2003) argues that this poem refers to displacement and exile. Such feelings are shared by the Poet and by Tran Ang Hung .Tran Anh Hung frames the Poet and the older sister paying a visit to his parents. By bringing there one of his prostitutes, the audience becomes aware of the love he feels for the woman. He brings his mother a gift of pears.[64] The Poet's loose life does not prevent him from being a respectful son. The first thing mentioned in the conversation is the Poet's father, absent from the room.

Mother: *His father won't let me work. I'm bored. I'm going round in circles. So I busy myself with small tasks.*

The Poet: *Is Papa well?*

[64] Food is an essential part of the way the film director constructs his narrative and the aestheticism of what he frames.

Mother: *He just came home. When he leaves I feel so alone. You're thin. When he was little, his nose bled. Does is still happen?*

The Poet: *Yes, sometimes.*

Poet's nose bleeding is the sign that connects him with his youth, to the period when he still had his innocence. Tran Anh Hung remarks upon the unconditional love offered by women, in this instance the Poet's mother. Again, the director reinforces traditional Vietnamese women's subordinate, but vital, role. In the same way that the mistress, in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), loves her immoral husband, so Poet's mother loves her son. The older sister seems to adore her procurer too. The woman looks at him with loving kindness and caresses his cheek. The passivity and pleasure in which the women portrayed by Tran Anh Hung accept mistreatments is highly phallocentric and offensive towards females. Prostitution is very often imposed and not chosen by women. Portraying someone forced into this despicable activity falling in love for her "owner" is the product of a male fantasy. The sister is not only "Orientalized" by the film director, but chained in an endless perpetration of phallocentric pleasure.

Father: *Is he still in there?*

Mother: *Please, speak to him.*

Father: *He came with his whore?*

Mother: *Please.*

Father: *What are you looking for?*

The Poet's mother shows the older sister a picture of her son when he was a five years old boy. The old woman refuses to see what her son has become. She has crystallized him, in her mind, at his age of innocence. In much the same way, the Vietnamese diaspora imagines Viet Nam in a romantic way, frozen in time in a period prior to the French and American wars.

In contrast, the Poet's father is portrayed as a traditional Vietnamese man - also by the fact that he won't allow his wife to work- who sees the moral corruption in which his son is tangled. When the Poet offers his mother some money, his father comes out of the room and starts hitting him with a bamboo brush. The Poet does not react against his father's assault. The gangster still has filial piety towards his parents. As the director explains:

> Question: The young gangster, played by Tony Leung, is also called "The Poet". Is that a reflection of your ambivalence toward him and toward the film?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: Of course. The Poet is someone who, on a spiritual level, considers himself dead to himself and society. He sold his innocence for easy money to enter the world of crime, and he's nostalgic for it. Innocence is at the heart of the film. Vietnam today is opening itself to market forces at their wildest- which is a kind of pollution- and in doing so, we might lose our innocence.
>
> The gangster-poet is aware of this problem; Cyclo and his sister are not. When they first arrive, he sees them for what they are -innocents- and the only way he can handle their innocence is to precipitate them into a life of crime. That's why he becomes his sister's pimp; that's why, when she cries after her first trick, for him it's a sort of consolation: innocence protesting against the hardness of reality (Behar: 1995).

The viewer can, in this scene, really appreciate the polarized identities of which the Poet is composed. Tran Anh Hung also shows his belief that basic Vietnamese Confucian traditions, such as respect of one's parents, are, or at least should be, at the base of Vietnamese culture.

Tran Anh Hung justifies the immoral actions of the criminals and blames the French-Vietnamese war, and the American-Vietnamese conflict for their life miseries. The audience is presented with fatherless maternity the lady Boss had to endure. Her starvation, and therefore the high alcohol consumption, during her pregnancy damaged her son's neurological system. As the Lady Boss says:

We were starving. No rice. People dying everywhere...We loved each other deeply. At sixteen or seventeen. We drank alcohol to forget our hunger. A bit of shrimp paste...on the end of a nail...and we drank. It lasted a year.T hen the child was born...He came out backwards. Too late...almost dead. The doctor said "Abnormal". A coward, he was a coward. The father left us. Why coward? He was only seventeen. Younger than his son now. And then...

The Lady Boss, despite her suffering connected to the loss of her son's father, does not blame him. The Poet, listening to the lady Boss, seems to be the only person that, suffering from the same form of alienation and stoicism, can fully understand her condition. Tran Anh Hung argues that the loss of the "father" is the factor that causes the most destruction in people's lives, and in Vietnamese society. The war Viet Nam fought against France and the United States of America are the main reasons for this lack of "fathers". The director, indirectly, blames Viet Nam's invaders for having generated the socio-economic causes responsible for the disappearance of the father figure.

The older sister seems to start enjoying her job as a prostitute when Tran Anh Hung frames her giving her service to a client who, in a setting very evocative of a tropical paradise, gives her a pedicure, filmed in a fetishised and sexualized fashion. The extradietic sound in the room is of birdsong. The audience cannot listen to the rumor of the traffic passing by. Cyclo, like his older sister, seems to take pleasure in the criminal actions he commits. Knife is so pleased with the bicycle taxi driver's job that he gives him ten American dollars. Dollars are used by the rich and the gangster as a method of interaction. The dollar, symbol of capitalism, is associated with criminal male power. Being paid in dollars, the currency of the new Viet Nam, is symbolic of the criminal nature of the individual receiving the money. Cyclo has performed a criminal act and, according to the director, has therefore lost part of his traditional Vietnamese, honest identity. Cyclo asks to become member of the

Poet's criminal organization. At this point, for the first time, the viewer sees the Poet committing an act of physical violence towards someone. The criminal goes towards Cyclo to punch him, but then, his nose starts bleeding and he rushes away. The Poet, deep in his heart, does not want to deprive Cyclo and his older sister of the innocence that he himself long ago lost. At the same time, the Poet is reassured by watching the siblings exploring and tasting the pollution of the corrupted and violent Ho Chi Minh City underworld.

The Poet makes Cyclo aware of what criminal life is about, when Mr Lullaby, a man who kills for the Lady Boss, has to kill one of his victim. Tran Anh Hung partially justifies the viciousness of Mr Lullaby with the vicissitudes he had to endure during the French-Vietnamese conflict:

> Mr Lullaby: *Look at my hands. See? In 1956 I was seventeen and a bullet cut the nerve, my hand stiffened up. Look at this...A bullet, through the neck. It came out the back. Guess which hole is bigger? And then this here: in 57, a bullet shattered this. You know why I'm telling you all this? I know what you are thinking faced with death. I understand it so well.*

The close encounters of both Lady Boss and Mr Lullaby with poverty, death, and sufferance have made them immune towards the violence and ferocity of crime. Mr Lullaby kills his victim while singing a traditional Vietnamese song. The killer is presented as a having dual personalities too. He is cold-blooded and, at the same time, compassionate in his killing. Cyclo cannot bear to watch the assassination. He hides his face in Knife's chest. Tran Anh Hung, by showing the discomfort Cyclo experiences during the murder, make the spectator understand that the bicycle taxi driver has still an innocent approach toward life. In spite of Cyclo wanting to become part of Ho Chi Minh's criminal underworld, he is so deeply rooted

in traditional Vietnamese culture that he cannot fully become a part of this new, "bad" Viet Nam.

However, that Cyclo will nonetheless become a criminal, has no choice but to do so, is expressed in the way he bites off a gecko's tail. As the director explains:

> Question: At one point, Cyclo grabs a lizard, breaking the animal's tail. We know it can grow back. Is that a metaphor of Vietnam?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: That is exactly what I tried to imply when we talked about metaphor: poetic images, thematic, theme-prolonging. The lizard's tail episode occurs when the Cyclo has decided to enter the world of crime. Again, as a filmmaker, I had to find an image to convey that. And it is the animal's face, somewhat diabolical with that frantically wagging tongue that symbolizes evil. What's important for me is to create images, often, perhaps, transitory, that are like icons, i.e. image with meaning, the image of something. That, to me, is my main job as a filmmaker. Nowadays you rarely see images of something, you just have images to tell a story (Behar: 1995).

Lizards in Vietnamese mythology are not associated with evil. Tran Anh Hung, in characterizing the gecko as a malignant animal, relies on Western imaginary. It is worth noting in Christianity reptiles are associated with evil, lust, and temptation. The hybrid filmmaker, in making a film about Viet Nam, uses some Western symbolism to convey his messages.

On the streets there is a strong reminder of the American-Vietnamese conflict when, in Cholon, a helicopter, transported by a truck, loses balance and collapses. The scars the war caused to Viet Nam are a recurrent theme of the film. Pham (2000) acknowledged that the Vietnamese wars are not of interest for Vietnamese youth. Evoking the Viet Nam- American war is a trait that is specifically characterstic of diasporic film makers. Tran Anh Hung

frames another Vietnamese object associated with the war, an AK-47, also known as a Kalashniknow. This specific model of weapon was used by the North Vietnamese Army and the Southern Communist Guerrillas. Very evocative of the American-Vietnamese conflict is also the F4-Phantom relic seen in the film in a Ho Chi Minh City cocktail bar, where the Poet and the older sister are spending the night drinking cocktails. The cocktail bar seems to be a place where wealthy Vietnamese consume Western alcoholic specialities. However, there is the diagetic sound of a Vietnamese nostalgic song being sung. Tran Anh Hung, by showing evoking the wars in this way, remarks that the French-Vietnamese and American-Vietnamese wars' shadows still impregnate Vietnamese society. The scars brought by the war are embodied in the physicality of particular characters. Nowadays, the Vietnamese are fighting a silent war against the highly corrosive capitalistic economic model. The poor Vietnamese classes are poorer than ever; the divide between rich and poor is expanding under the existing system.

A shot that illustrates the innocence, sensuality, and corruption of the prostitutes, and which represent the director's image of modern Viet Nam, is when they are shown playing with water pistols and then, while lying on a bed, eating the flesh of ripe papaya fruits, and other fruits considered exotics by Westerners. All the exotic fruits are on the girls' bed, and among them there is the picture of the Poet, age five, with his mother. The lust of life, and power, has entrapped the Poet in a life of crime. The betel palm leaf flower the gangster dissects, all white and spotless inside, gets stained with the blood coming out of his nose. Whatever he touches, even if unintentionally, becomes impure.

When the corpse of a bicycle taxi driver is thrown in front of Cyclo's bicycle after a military van hits him, this makes Cyclo think of his father:

> *I dreamt about your death, Father. You died a second time to save me. This morning, I feel strangely calm, as if I'm living in your body. In your silhouette, your walk, your gestures. Those bony fingers, this rough hand. Is this yours or mine? I feel your muscles flex in my arms. This skin, it's yours burnt, toughened, defying the heat, the cold, the years. These veins, you called them the paths of life. Now, I understand.*

Cyclo after his dream feels very ambivalent towards his criminal life. The spirit of Cyclo's father saves the young bicycle taxi driver from an immoral, violent, and criminal life. In spite of his predicament, he wants to honour his father and traditional Vietnamese culture and customs. Cyclo's father symbolizes the attitudes and idealism that Tran Anh Hung associates with the traditional Confucian father figure. Furthermore, the director shows how individuals are deeply imprinted with the hierarchical structuring of the father-son relationship (Slote and Devos: 1998). Both Cyclo and the Poet honour their fathers by renouncing their criminal ways. As argued by Slote and Davis (1998), the hierarchical relationship of father and son is so firmly established that it is imprinted on the child's psyche and is retained by the adult.

There follows an extreme close-up on the ten dollar note he was given by Knife, and we note the perplexing manner -the feeling of puzzlement is emphasized by the extradiegetic music- in which the man handles it. This shot is emblematic of the moral dilemma Cyclo is facing. Cyclo chooses a life of innocence and goes to his boss and asks her to give him the chance to become a bicycle taxi driver again. Cyclo's attempts to go back to his "innocent" life are in vain, and The Boss Lady does not grant him liberty. Instead, Knife, Tooth and the Poet train the former bicycle taxi driver how to use a pistol and give him some drugs to calm him just in case Cyclo is too afraid of using the gun. A stack of twenty American dollars notes is given to Cyclo as a compensation for the murder.

From the pastoral shots of the older sister and The Poet in the Vietnamese countryside, the viewers are transported to the claustrophobic and artificial space of a Ho Chi Minh City discotheque. The older sister is to be given to one of The Poet's clients. The Poet hands the client the key of the flat where he takes the older sister. The film director frames the Poet as being very troubled by having sold the older sister to the wealthy Vietnamese man. The gangster walks out of the discotheque and his nose starts bleeding. He wanders in the Ho Chi Minh City traffic in complete alienation. The pastoral Viet Nam represents the innocence and morality that is no longer present in the modern Vietnamese city.

The morning after, the older sister return the Poet's flat with her wrists cut and having lost her virginity. The two prostitutes, working for the gangster, clean and weep bitter tears at the cruelty that she has endured. The older sister, by losing her innocence, in turn deprives the Poet and the two women from the feeling of being pure:

> Knife: *He said he didn't know [that the older sister was a virgin].He suggests we forget about it. He shelled out 600 dollars. That's more than for a virgin. He said the cuts weren't his fault.*

The film director shows how people's bodies are used as trading goods. In the global market economy which has now extended to Viet Nam, everything has a monetary value. Immoral and violent acts can be settled by paying the right amount in American dollars. The symbolic association Tran Anh Hung makes between the dollar and corruption is evident, in the film.

The Poet has strong feelings about the older sister having lost her innocence. Therefore he decides to kill the man that took advantage of the chaste prostitute. The man dies with his six-hundred dollars stuffed into his mouth. The Poet's morality does not allow

him to trade innocence for money. This character very clearly represents the dual and hybrid nature of Ho Chi Minh City, of traditions and modernity. As the director states:

> Question: One can romanticize violence through the visuals, if not the feeling.
> Tran Anh Hung: That's why I hope you felt another kind of violence here, a moral one. I often hear people say that in American films violence is gratuitous, I don't agree. It's always justified, meaning the hero's wife gets killed early on, so he retaliates, therefore it's justified. That's mechanical violence. In Quentin Tarantino's films, on the other hand, the violence is playful, jubilant. When you deal with violence, you must avoid the playful, the jubilant, the laughter, and the justification. It's easy satisfaction. When Cyclo's bicycle is stolen, there's no need for the young robbers to hit him. Yet they do, and I show it, to give you the feeling of how unfair it is. I even make the scene a tad longer, so as to make the unfairness of it all, and the violence it entails, even more unbearable, and you can't desire it. As opposed to *Reservoir Dogs* where, after the guy has had his ear chopped off, you are frustrated because he's not burnt to ashes (Behar:1995).

The shots that follow the man's murder take place in a Vietnamese primary school, where a class of pupils is singing and clapping their hands. The Poet redeems the older sister, who goes back to her old life. The film director frames her while shopping at the market. At the same time, the Poet gets back part of the innocence he has lost by rejecting his client's money, for his moral ideals. He goes back to the innocent state he had as a child. The song sung by the Vietnamese children is symbolic of the transaction that allows the Poet to get back in touch with his moral self. The film is full of symbolic occurrences. The ways in which the characters act without verbality often conveys more meaning that words could allow. Such non-verbal dialogue is amplified by the elliptical scenes that form part of the narrative. Tran Anh Hung uses the same elliptical narrative technique that Krzysztof Kieslowski uses in the *Three Color* trilogy. In the film background the viewer can see characters and objects present in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), in the same way that the

Polish director makes visual connections between the films in his trilogy. The papaya fruit appears with its symbolic and synesthetic sensual properties in both films. Furthermore, the actress plying Ti in the earlier film appears as the servant who prepares the Lady Boss' meals in Cyclo.

Cyclo is still a prisoner of his boss Lady. He does not want to kill therefore he gets drunk and take the pills he was given by the gangster. Tran Anh Hung links the consumption of alcoholic drinks to the moral decay of his character. The viewer sees the two siblings being drunk after consuming alcohol. Furthermore, all the gangsters, and the rich, consume high quantities of alcohol. The Poet feels so guilty and alienated from the world that he commits suicide by burning his flat with himself inside. He is no longer able to tolerate his dual existence. The fire is used to convey a symbol of purification. While the firefighters are going to extinguish the fire, the Lady Boss' son gets struck by one of the firefighters' engines and dies. Cyclo, under the effect of drugs and alcohol paints himself in blue paint, as the Lady Boss' son used to. This is the link, as Tran Anh Hung explains, between him and the mentally impaired man:

> Question: The symbol of the dollar that corrupts is clear. What about the symbol of the yellow paint and the blue paint Cyclo is covered?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: It is not symbolic, it has a function. Cyclo is caught in the web of crime and violence, and one doesn't see how he could get out of it, except for a miracle. The miracle is embodied by his Woman-Boss. She starts out as an evil force, harming him, then turns into a force of deliverance, through maternal love she transfers from her mad son onto the Cyclo. To make the transfer clear, I had to create a link between the mad son and the Cyclo, and that was paint.
>
> At least, that's the link that the mother perceives. There is another, which only the viewer is privy to, and that's the fish. The first time we see the lady with her mad son, she tells him, "You are my little

> fish". That's the first mention of fish in the film. At the end, when Cyclo has gone mad and is covered with paint, the fish opens and closes his mouth, as was the case with the mad son.
>
> At the beginning, the fish has no particular meaning. At the end, you can say it is the symbol of the transfer of the Woman-Boss' love for her son onto the Cyclo. I'm a filmmaker therefore I have to create images that convey that (Behar: 1995).

After the fire, the older sister goes to the Poet's flat where she finds the photo of him, age five, and his mother. The older sister is framed in a temple lighting up incense sticks for the Poet, for the *Tet* celebration. While she is there, two pickpockets steal her money and the picture of the Poet. The filmmaker wants the older sister to completely lose every connection she has with her impure past.

The Lady Boss goes to the flat he is living in, and transfers all her maternal love to Cyclo. She grants him freedom and Knife and Tooth wishes him goodbye. However, both Cyclo and the older sister are trapped in the poverty they left before becoming involved with criminal gangs. Tran Anh Hung cannot see any legal escape from poverty for the Ho Chi Minh City underclasses. They are destined to be trapped in their misery for the rest of their lives. Cyclo still brings his older and younger sister to school, and leave his grandfather at his workplace. The cyclopousse continues to live the life he had before his criminal experiences.

As touched upon above, a major theme of both of Tran Anh Hung's feature-length films is that fatherlessness is the cause of annihilation in contemporary Vietnamese society:

> Question: Apart from Cyclo's references to his father's death, there is a distinct lack of father figures through the film. Is the absence of fathers one of Vietnam's problem today?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: You are quite right. When I started writing the script, my intention was to talk about rapport between fathers and sons. The idea comes from a physical sensation that swells up in me from

> time to time, that I'm doing the same gestures my father did - I've been able to verify that through writings, music preferences, etc. If in today's Vietnam, you take someone like Cyclo, who has no father, no education, no future, which moral yardstick can he use in order to grow?
>
> The film presents variations on this theme. Cyclo's father is dead, yet present in his memory; the poet's father is physically present, but dead in his son's mind, which makes it logical for these two guys to come together and become almost like brothers.
>
> And when Cyclo resumes his rapport with his father, he is, in a way, spiritually liberated, as through his father, he reestablishes a rapport with his ancestors. The oldest cult in Vietnam is that of ancestors', and its most important rule is "Live as good life as you can, so that you can transmit to those that follow you, just as those before you tried to do for you" (Behar:1995).

Tran Anh Hung, in *Cyclo* (1995) tries to catch glimpses of the highly moral and traditional Vietnamese culture that appears to him to have vanished in contemporary Vietnamese society. The film director sees Vietnamese traditional culture and society through very nostalgic eyes. The process is typical of diasporic filmmakers (Naficy: 2001). The Vietnamese traditional songs and their lyrics, the Vietnamese traditional food, the indigenous fruits and vegetable, the aboriginal sounds of birds and insects, the pastoral Vietnamese landscape makes the viewers feel nostalgic of the traditional Viet Nam, and the loss of classical Vietnamese culture. These elements are used to give the audience a synesthetic experience of Viet Nam. The hybrid nature of the film director emerges in the film by the way in which he contrasts Western traditions with traditional Vietnamese ones. The Western capitalistic habits are seen to act as destructive presences in Vietnamese society. The poor are getting poorer, and morality, due to substandard economic conditions, is being eroded.

A la Verticale de l'Ete (Mùa hè chiều thẳng đứng; At the Height of Summer/ The Vertical Ray of the Sun) (2000)

At the Height of Summer (2000) is Tran Anh Hung's third feature-length film. The movie was set and shot in Viet Nam, around Hanoi and Halong Bay, and is set in the post-*Doi Moi* period. The production was financed by French, German and Vietnamese companies: Canal+, Hang Phim Truyen, Lazennec Films, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), and Arte France Cinéma. The actors are of Vietnamese or of Vietnamese ancestry. The main character is again played by Tran Nu Yên-Khê, the film director's muse and wife. As with the director's earlier films, *At the Height of Summer* (2000) focuses on highly aestheticized shots and minimalist dialogue. "The elegance of Mark Lee's photography is not just a matter of stylishness but of philosophy – Tran wants objects and moments to resonate with all their potential sensuousness." (Romney: 2001). Tran Anh Hung's film is certainly directed toward an art-house cinema audience.

The story concerns three sisters called Suong, Khanh, and Lien gathering for preparing the traditional meal for the death anniversary of their mother. While preparing the meal, and after it, the three sisters have mischievous discussions about sexuality, and discuss an alleged love affair their mother had with one of her classmates. Suong runs a cafe and is married to Quoc, a photographer working for the Vietnamese Botanical Society. Khanh's husband is named Kien and is a writer. Lien lives with her brother Hai, an aspiring actor. Lien works in Suong's cafe as a waitress. Despite the family's smooth Confucian facade, Suong has a lover and Quoc has a parallel family, Kien is very attracted to a woman called Ngan he meets on a visit to Ho Chi Minh City- which the film characters still call Saigon-

and Lien has a borderline incestuous relationship with Hai. Hoa, her boyfriend, is scared by Lien's domineering character.

Quoc tells Suong about his lover. She accepts her husband having another family as long as he starts to treat her with the passion he had before they were married. Khanh discovers a note from Ngan in her husband's jacket but does not tell him. Lien thinks she is pregnant but without foundation. A month after the death anniversary of their mother the family gathers again to celebrate the anniversary of the father's death. The film takes place in a largely imaginative Hanoi, a Ho Chi Minh City luxury hotel, and the Vietnamese countryside. The film mostly takes place in Lien and Hai's flat, in Tuan's apartment, and in Suong's cafe.

As in every film made by Tran Anh Hung, the aesthetic composition of spaces is vital. It gives the audience both symbolic and synesthetic signals:

> Phipps: Were the building and the interiors specifically for the movie?
>
> Tran Anh Hung: Yes, exactly. With my art director [Benoit Barough], we worked with already-existing structures and reorganized everything. We were inspired by two American painters, Mark Rothko and [Robert] Rauschenberg. Mark Rothko for the works of color, and Rauschenberg for the organization of objects and images (Phipps: 2001).

The use of Rothko's colours and Rauchenberg's object layout give each frame such balanced structure that the viewers seem to be presented with moving paintings. In particular, Hai and Lien's flat visualises the art of the two American artists. The colors in the film and the paintings have the same harmonious qualities. The walls in Hai's bedroom are painted with the same technique and color shades that are present in Rotkho's classic painting. The

primitive style paints on the bedroom wall are made by the diasporic, Vietnamese artist Tran Trong Vu. Tran Anh Hung's hybrid identity is manifested in the manner the Franco-Vietnamese film director combines Western art with the work of indigenous Vietnamese artists. The director's identity is mediated between the Vietnamese culture of his parents and the French culture that he absorbed while growing up. In other words, his identity is liminal to both the Western and Vietnamese world.

The films open with a medium shot of Hai sleeping on his bed. The viewers are made to feel the tranquility of the scene by the extradiegetic sound of birds and the diegetic music Pale Blue Eyes written by Lou Reed and performed by the Velvet Underground. The music is very relaxing. The diegetic music gives the entire scene a congruous and fluid rhythm. The wind chimes like sounds of the beads string curtains give the spectators feel the harmony and the calm atmosphere in Hai and Lien's flat. The two siblings are framed during their morning rituals. Hai practices some gymnastics, while Lien performs *chi gong* movements. The extradietic sounds of traffic, voices, and crickets coming from the streets do not destroy the calm atmosphere but, rather, accentuate it. Tran Anh Hung uses sounds that are reminding of the peace and harmony he experienced when he, as a child, was still living in Viet Nam. As he says:

> My thoughts turned back to my childhood in DaNang, remembering the time when I'd be waiting to fall asleep at night, my mind racing from one thing to another, nothing precise. The smell of fruit coming in through the window, a woman's voice singing on the radio. Everything was so vague. It was like a feeling of suspension. I've never experienced harmony in my life as it was then. It was like just a matter of translating that rhythm and that musicality into the new film (Ebert: 2001).

Tran Anh Hung's nostalgia for his Vietnamese youth's melodiousness is manifested in Hai and Lien's flat at the beginning of *At the Height of Summer* (2000). The film director uses the medium of cinema to recreate the phantasmatic Viet Nam that he has lost. The sensual and highly synesthetic atmosphere created by the flat's colors, the diegetic and extradiegetic sounds, and Lien and Hai's movements, is filled up with beauty and carnality. The sexual and incestuous allusions enrich and gratify the senses of the spectators:

> Lien: *Remember yesterday when we were in Cha Ca Street? It was crowded. And I had a weird feeling.*
>
> Hai: *What?*
>
> Lien: *I thought that people mistook us for a couple. Haven't you ever noticed that?*

Lien is portrayed as being mischievous toward her older brother. In his earlier film, Tran Anh Hung never portrayed a woman talking about sexual relationships, especially incestuous ones, in such an open and direct manner. In *The Waiting Stone* (1991) incest was the cause of a familial crisis. On the contrary, in *At the Height of Summer* (2000), Lien gains pleasure from thinking that she and Hai do look like a couple. Lien is the antithesis of both Mui from *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1997), and the older sister from *Cyclo* (1999). She is a lively and teasing individual that loves playing with her older brother. She is critical of Vietnamese traditional culture: Tran Anh Hung portrays the young lady as disobedient by her dismissive attitude towards the traditional dishes the family cooks for anniversary and celebratory lunches. Lien: "*I don't decide what we're eating. It's always the traditional dishes.*"

The bunches of lotus flowers framed in these shots give the audience the exotic feelings Westerners expect to experience about Viet Nam. The extradiegetic natural sounds and the visual representation of Vietnamese flora and fauna give the viewers a feeling of Viet Nam that is typical of colonial imagery. The visual manner in which Tran Anh Hung

represents his country of origin is partially mediated through the French colonial ideology, as Norindr (1996) defined it. The seductive nature of the Vietnamese flora is present into the open-air kitchen where the three sisters are preparing their mother's commemorative death lunch. The extradiegetic sounds of birds and insects make the epicurean sensation stronger. The presence and handling of food enhances the audience's sensorial stimulus. Lien is framed with a close-up shot while cutting in half a *gac*[65] containing some red seed. Tran Anh Hung frames the cutting of the fruit in the same style in which Mui, in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), was cutting the papaya fruit. The gac fruit's seeds are a vital component in preparing red glutinous rice, a dish consumed during death celebratory banquets (Huu: 1998). The diasporic Vietnamese filmmaker presents his audience with traditional Vietnamese rituals that are part of his own culture. The attention to beauty, used to convey to the audience the physical sensation of being in the film, is expressed in the meticulous methodology in which the food is prepared. Simultaneously, Tran Anh Hung remembers and impregnates food with nostalgic feeling of his family's ancestral land. As Naficy (2001) argues, this is a typical element of diasporic movies.

The men are shown smoking, an activity predominantly performed by men and bad mannered women. The women are portrayed in the kitchen, as expected in Vietnamese culture. The kitchen can be seen as a place where women are supposed to be. The separate area where the food is made can be compared to an antique Greek *gunaikeion.*[66] The part of the house reserved to females can be seen as a place of women's reclusion, but also as a sphere of female cohesion in their critique of a male-centered society, as the dialogue indicates:

---

[65] *Gac* fruit: momordica cochienchinensis.

[66] *Gunaikeion:* Greek word meaning female house. The *gunaikeion* was the part of the house reserved to women.

Khanh (while cleaning chicken's feet): *This is my favorite part. It's strange. Satisfying and disgusting at the same time.*

Suong: *It's true. We women are condemned to disgusting things. In the old days, we couldn't touch a man's head*[67]*. That noble part of the body must not be soiled by our hands.*

Khanh: *But men have always liked and allowed us to touch other things.*

Suong: *Exactly. So is that thing considered noble? We must conclude it isn't since we're allowed to touch it. It must be classified as a disgusting thing.*

Khanh: *I don't find it so very disgusting. On the contrary...*

Lien: What do you mean?

Khanh: *Oh, well, you could call it a culinary fantasy.*

Suong: *What?*

Khanh: *Listen. I always thought that fried with a little bit of garlic ...it must have an amazing texture...both tender and crunchy.*

Probyn (2000) argues that eating food equates to feeding identity. Khanh's fantasy of eating a human penis symbolizes her desire to incorporate, in her female body and psyche, the male identity. In food symbolism, the easiest way of incorporating maleness is through the consumption of the part of the body that represents masculinity, the phallus. Castrating the male empowers the women by depriving males of their own masculinity. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Khanh's fantasy of eating a human penis is a typical masculine one. Stratton (2000) notes that there is a strong link between sex and food: sex is the male domain, while food is a feminine site. The female mouth has been fetishized and transformed by male fantasies into the site of male sexual desire:

> Set in the contextual of cultural fetishism, with its male preoccupations of appropriation, assimilation internalization, and consumption, the shift from the vagina to the vaginal mouth combines with the association of hunger with sexual desire (Stratton: 147)

[67] In *The Scent the Green Papaya,* Thu makes the same observation about women touching men's heads.

More that empowering women in the kitchen, Tran Anh Hung, who was scripted the film, makes them speak of men's sexual fantasies. The close-up of the chicken's feet being washed, skinned, and having their nails chopped off, is an image that is highly evocative of the human male genital organ and what the three sisters would do with it if they had to cook it. Despite the three sisters having the appearance of traditional Vietnamese women, they secretly transgress Confucian norms. The film director portrays the rigidity of these Vietnamese Confucian roles by making two people born in the same day have difficulties in addressing each others. Lien calls Toan older brother, and he calls her older sister. The film director remarks upon the chauvinism existing in Viet Nam by having Kien tell Toan to call Lien younger sister. In Vietnamese culture, married men traditionally refer to their wives as "younger sister".

Tran Anh Hung frames, with an extreme close-up, the chicken that Suong, Khanh, and Lien cook. The food prepared for the commemorative banquet is then presented to the family's altar. As Vietnamese traditional culture expects, the first person to present the offering to the deceased relative is the older brother followed by his wife (McLeod and Nguyen: 2001). It seems significant then that Tran Anh Hung frames Suong, the older sister, starting the opening ceremony of her mother's death anniversary. He empowers her by making her behavior diverge from Confucian norms: the first born woman begins the votive prayers directed to her mother. Clearly not all Vietnamese tradition is automatically good. The film director, using a medium shot, then frames the ancestors' altar with a table beneath it covered with food. On the wall, next to the altar there is one of Quoc's photos, representing a plant. The extradiegetic music and the symmetry of the image make the shots aesthetically refined and palatable. Tran Anh Hung makes the characters go, one by one, to the family's shrine; after having finished their prayer they dissolve from the screen. The technique used

by the film director to shoot this scene gives it a phantasmic feeling. The actors are themselves transformed into ghostly figures or spirits. The sacral way in which Tran Anh Hung represents his family's traditional culture is symbolized by the details the film director uses in his settings. The respect the film director feels for his ancestral culture is manifested by the characters and their precision in performing certain rituals: Suong: "*The incense is burnt. Let's carve the chicken.*"

The rhythm of *At the Height of Summer* (2000) is provided by the precise and small gestures that the film characters are instructed to perform. The anniversary of Soung, Khan, Hai, and Lien's mother's death is an occasion for the family to be reunited. The familial social gathering is marked by culinary sexual fantasies. It is also characterized by the speculation that the siblings' mother had an affair with one of her former classmates called Toan. The extramarital relationship is explored by the novelist Kien. Tran Anh Hung tells the audience, through Khanh, that Toan died in 1943 of starvation during the Japanese occupation. The film director, in each of his films, mentions the wars that flagellated Viet Nam. Tran Anh Hung never shows images of the war; the film director mentions the wars in the characters speech, in the extradiegetic background sounds, or in people's physicality.

The nostalgic and romantic nature in which the film director shoots the family reunion is represented by the nostalgic music the family sings at the end of the day, while still at Suong's cafe. The song performed is a traditional Vienamese one whose title is *Cui Cung Cho Mot Tinh Yeu*, written by Vu Than Xuang, which in English translates as "final love". The night serenade marks the end of the death anniversary but not the end of the sisters' gossip. Khanh, the sister alluding to the sexual nature of food, tells her husband that Quoc does not sexually satisfy Suong. The sexual emptiness residing in Quoc's body and spirit is

also detected by Kien who describes his wife's brother-in-law as being immune to desire. Tran Anh Hung's sexual allusions are not confined to the vocal medium. The film maker frames Hai falling out his bed because his sister is sleeping with him. The scene, marking the siblings waking up, is completed by relaxing and soft music by Lou Reed called *Coney Island Baby*. The film director makes the viewers aware that there is a sexual tension between Hai and Lien, however, Tran Anh Hung does not encourage the audience to fantasize upon it:

> Hai: *Just when did you get in my bed?*
>
> Lien: *In the middle of the night. I was cold.*
>
> Hai: *Next time I'll toss you on the floor.*

Lien's attempts in seducing Hai are in vain. The brother dismisses his sister's sensual game in a style that does not allow the viewers to speculate on him being interested in her.

Hanoi streets, compared to the chaotic urbanism of Ho Chi Minh City, are calm and safe. Tran Anh Hung stated that Hanoi was the ideal urban setting for shooting *At the Height of Summer* (2000):

> Phipps: The city of Hanoi inspired the film. Tell me more about that.
>
> Tran Anh Hung: Effectively, it was Hanoi that suggested the idea of the film, because Hanoi possesses a rather particular quality, which is the heat, the slowness, and the formidable sensuality. In Hanoi, the inside of houses are very little, and the people do certain activities normally done inside outside on the sidewalk. Under the communist system, there are little common water sources on the street which families share. So people go out in the street, to wash themselves, to wash their vegetables, to wash their clothes, and also to wash the children. So what happens is that when you walk down the street, at night when the light fades, there is a certain sensation of sweetness to life. The smiles of women who

> wash themselves, things like that. It's truly very beautiful, very powerful and very sensual. There you go. That's why I made the film there (Phipps: 2001).

The sensuality and beauty of Hanoi is reflected in the highly sensorial grace of Soung, Khanh, Lien, and Bui Kim Ngan. Their stylized gestures and aesthetic elegance are appreciated by the male gaze. Tran Anh Hung, by the fetishized manner in which he frames the women, makes them object of pleasure. However, Hai is also framed with the same fetishised gaze. The way in which the sisters' brother is framed, by exercising as soon as he gets up, him being aware of his clothes style, and the lack of him having a wife or girlfriend, make the viewers question if Hai is homosexual. Hai's body is presented as being highly sensual and sweet, as Tran Anh Hung stated, like Hanoi. The gentleness and seductiveness of Hanoi is also presented sonorously. The noise of the traffic is not intense. Natural sounds are privileged over mechanical ones, there is an intense extradiegetic chirping of crickets.

Khanh and Kien's house is surrounded by the same extradiegetic sounds that are present on the streets: the interiors are filled by plants; the house furniture and pottery is typical Vietnamese. The design of the couple's house is very detailed, with the same attention to details Tran Anh Hung put in every setting. Next to Kien's desk there is a tray containing fruits, one of which is a ripe papaya fruit[68]. Later on in the scene Khanh tells her husband she is pregnant. Khanh is framed in the garden, being used as a kitchen, while singing and washing some vegetables. Her love and loyalty for her husband is is shown by the gestures, and her mimic expression, in which she gently washes and pats dry his hands. The attention and gestural style in which Tran Anh Hung frames the quotidian life is what make his films so awakening for the spectators' senses. The microcosmic actions framed by the film director

[68] This is the ripe papaya fruit that Tran Anh Hung uses as a symbol of sexual maturity and sensuality in his other work.

are what gives the audience synesthetic feelings. The audience can feel and understand Viet Nam by the close encounters, highly detailed and aestheticised, that the director gives of daily existence.

In this awakened sensorial space Khanh informs Kien of her pregnancy. Khanh keep her parturiency a secret from the others; Tran Anh Hung portrays the siblings' family as a superficially united one whose micro life is entangled with secrets and anti-Confucian morality. The kitchen itself, with its sounds and vegetation, reminds one of a luscious, copulating forest. Tran Anh Hung, to symbolize the pregnancy, frames, with a close-up, a white egg posed on a mossy rock. Simultaneously Lien is looking at herself in the mirror, sticking her stomach out simulating that she is pregnant. Sexuality and sensuality are themes constantly encountered in *At the Height of Summer* (2000). The people devoted to this sensual enjoyment, and leading it, are women. Men are portrayed as tools floating around them and subjected to female's will. Women are portrayed as being in charge of their sexual lives. The director, somewhat in contrast to his earlier films, portrays "transgressive" female behavior in a positive light.

Soung has a lover. They meet in a room that Tuan uses just for the couple's amorous encounters. The predominant colour in the room is red, the symbol of love and passion in the Western world, and of luck and happiness in traditional Vietnamese culture. The room, compared to the siblings' flats, is very claustrophobic. There are wooden statutes, and an altar in the room. The doors and interiors are heavily decorated and there is a strong presence of gold color in the apartment. There is no sexual relationship between Soung and Tuan: the two only exchange passionate kisses and hugs. The extramarital relationship is very carnal, but at the same time, highly spiritual and verbally castigated. The verbal restriction is imposed by

Suong. The bodily pleasure cannot be fully fulfilled by the audio apparatus. Soung has imposed a vow of silence on the affair as if to limit the sin attached to it:

> Tuan: *I want us to talk. I can't take anymore. This vow of silence...I can't stand it anymore. We meet again. We love each other without a word. I know nothing of your life now. I miss the days when all we did was talk. If you don't speak, I'll go crazy. I can't stop looking at your lips. Have you noticed? I want to see them move. You want to tell me something?*
>
> Suong (moving her lips without emitting any sound: The lip signals read by Tuan): *If you speak...one more time...we won't see...each other...ever again.*
>
> Tuan: *Okay, I'll stop talking.*

Tuan, by concentrating his attention on Suong's lips, makes them symbolize their sensuousness. As previously mentioned, the conflation of the mouth and the vagina is pervasive. The male lover is not allowed to experience Soung's sexual organ, or to fully benefit from her mouth, her lips. Tuan is not allowed to hear the sound of love. Tuan obeys to Soung's will. Tran Anh Hung empowers the Vietnamese woman to lead her secretive liaison. Tran Anh Hung partially justifies Soung and Tuan's love affair because of Quoc's lack of passion. The film maker partially indicates the rebellious nature of Suong by portraying her smoking and indulging in bodily pleasures, such as neck caresses from Tuan. The highly tactile experience is amplified by the erotic space where the couple meets. The Vietnamese female identity has transformed from a repressed to a sexually-liberated one.

The claustrophobia of this shot is in contrast with the open scenario where Quoc and his colleague are working. The botanic photographer and the painter are working on the Vietnamese coast. We perceive the heavy extradiegetic sounds of birds and crickets chirping. The place where the artists are working is isolated; the only other human presence is a

fisherman working in the bay. Tran Anh Hung frames this scene with the same lust and fetishism as he uses to frame Mui and the older sisters Lien, Soung, and Khanh washing themselves. The torrential sound of the rain awakes Hai. Lien is sleeping on his bed, he has spent the night in his sister's one:

> Hai: *I fell out of the bed again. [...] In the middle of the night. [...] I slept in your bed. [...] You took all the room in my bed. I had to sleep in yours.*

Lien is showing an increasingly controlling attitude towards Hai. He does not do any gym. He smokes staring out the window, at the rainy Hanoi. Lien smokes too, but Hai throws her cigarette out the window. Smoking is not usual for Hai, he does it because it is raining. The *mal de vivre* brought by the rain is reinforced by the casual manner in which Hai smokes. The shots are accompanied by the sad diegetic music *Soaps* performed by the Arab Strap. Hai, compared to the liveliness of his sisters, is a quiet individual whose life spins around Lien. The roles he has to play as an actor are minors ones. In his new actor role he has to play the heroine's one night stand. The scene does not contain any dialogue between the two. Hai's love affair has similitudes with the speechless liaison his sister Suong has with Tuan. Tranh Anh Hung creates here a microcosmos in which his characters have double lives interconnected by chance. The elliptical nature of the editing chains each of the film's vignettes to the others and also enables the audience to physically sense the film.

The fate makes Hai interpret the part of a wordless love affair, the same silennce that governs Soung's illegitimate love life; the destiny that makes Hai want to eat sweet boiled potatoes when it rains, and Khanh cook sweet boiled potatoes, in a rainy Hanoi, for her and Kien's lunch. The way in which Tran Anh Hung links each shot to another enables the viewer to not lose sense of *At the Height of Summer*'s (2000) sensorial sphere. The viewer becomes

engaged by the interlocking stories and has the sense that they can actually interact with the film by looking for clues which link the scenes together. The director's purpose here is to enable the audience to experience Viet Nam by process of synesthesia. Furthermore, it is with this use of sensoriality that he appropriates his own Vietnamese identity.

The narrative circularity of the film gives the spectator the feeling that the characters' stories are not owned by a particular individual, but that the same events are repeated as if part of an endless cycle. The siblings' mother supposedly had an extramarital relation; Suong has an affair; Quoc has another family; Kien succumbs to the temptation of wanting to have another woman; and Lien has a secret boyfriend called Hoa. The same experiences are repeated from generation to generation, and from character to character. Even the character's name, roles, and symbolic objects are transported from film to film. Tran Anh Hung makes Suong mention the names Mui and Mai. Mui and Mai are also the names of female characters in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993). The director's films show an evolution in the manner in which he imagines Viet Nam, both in a temporal and cultural sense. Starting from portraying the country in a very enclosed and oneiric way, he shifts to painting a picture of a contemporary Viet Nam characterized by many idiosyncrasies However, the narrative elements do not themselves substantially change from film to film.

Lien's impetuous and domineering personality makes Hoa wanting to end the relationship he has with her. Tran Anh Hung does not portray women as frail and passive objects, as he did in his previous short films and feature movies. Women, in *At the Height of Summer* (2000), are sentimentally independent and subject men to their will. Tran Anh Hung still portrays them as being enclosed to certain places encoded as females' alcoves. However, what might appear as a restricted area becomes the arena where the three sisters exercise their

power. The confidence of the three female siblings intimidates the men surrounding them. What the viewer perceives as restrictive space for the Vietnamese women is transformed by the director into an area where the female is seen to express a rebellious nature towards male power. The Vietnamese female, for the director, is not necessarily subjected by traditional society. The only male Lien enjoys the company of is her brother. Their interaction, in the absence of the other sisters, is playful and mischievous as it is the romance between a man and a woman. As the director states:

> Very often in cinema, between brother and sister, it's like this: there's incest, and that's the main subject of the film. Or, there's no incest, and no one speaks about it. If life, there are things between the two states...things are a little ambiguous. In the film, I wanted to create an ambiance like this, very light (Phipps: 2001).

Ambivalence and double life are the main qualities of the film characters:

> Quoc (talking to the fisherman): *Right now, I'm torn between two places...that pull me with equal force. If I choose one place, even temporarily...I feel guilty toward the other one. With time, a guilty conscience turns into sadness.*

Quoc's families are ruining his life, he feels equally guilty towards the two women and sons with whom he is sentimentally linked. Quoc's other family lives in a boat house, in an isolated bay in the middle of the sea. The fantastic location Tran Anh Hung choses to shoot these scenes is more a mental representation of Viet Nam, and the second family of Quoc, than a real one. In reality, it seems very unlikely that a single woman with a small child would live in the middle of nowhere with no facilities. While Quoc is with his second family, Soung enjoys the silent and carnal pleasures offered by Tuan. The silent relationship

suddenly turns into a very vocal one. Suong sings Tuan a traditional Vietnamese song, the same one Soung's family and guests sung at the end of the anniversary of her mother's death: *Cui Cung Cho Mot Tinh Yeu*. The song Suong interprets for Tuan is premonitory of the end of Soung and Tuan's relationship.

Tran Anh Hung in *At the Height of Summer* (2000) uses Vietnamese traditional music, music composed by a French-Vietnamese composer, and Western music. The divergence of these three very different music styles give the audience an image of contemporary Viet Nam, a place of both traditional Vietnamese and global features. As the film director explains:

> My film told the story of several couples' problems, their struggle with fidelity. But at the same time I wanted the viewer to feel the ambience of this culture. Confucian culture- the idea of harmony and unity- is very important for them. At the same time that I wanted to show problems, I wanted the viewer to sense a certain harmony that floats over the entire film. Therefore, there is a contradiction in the project. So I tried to find the equilibrium in the rhythm of the film. Even before writing the script, I already physically felt the rhythm and musicality of the film. And if I chose Lou Reed ["Pale Blue Eyes", "Coney Island Baby"] and Arab Strap["Soaps'] and the Married Monk ["Tell Her Tell Her"] for the film, it's because these pieces of music have a long, progressive development that go perfectly with the rhythm that I wanted for the film. The use of American music is a way of acknowledging the presence of modernity in Viet Nam today. In Viet Nam, as you can see, especially in Hanoi, it's a very provincial city, where modernity has not yet imprinted its stresses and demands. It has not entered modernity, it's true. However, there are traces of modernity, like the portable telephone- and American music (Phipps: 2001).

The director pays remarkable attention to detail which transforms even such a candid shot into an erotic one by the use of a close-up of some wet footmarks on the red wall on the

lovers' apartment. The audience is persistently reminded of the sensual, and at the same time innocent, relationship between Suong and Tuan. Quoc, while visiting his second family, decides to speak to Suong about his double life. Suong's husband is not able to live in such a morally ambivalent state: as he says, his double life is drying him out. His lack of passion is caused by the guilt and remorse he feels toward his women and offspring. Kien is left with a note written with red lipstick by the woman he met on the flight to Hanoi. Bui Kim Ngan, by writing, with lipstick, her room number and time to meet, gives strong sexual signs to Kien. Red lipstick is associated with sensuality and sexuality. The woman's mouth becomes Kien's site of desire. The audience's gaze is directed upon Bui Kim Ngan's sexuality. Thra Anh Hung frames the woman in a highly fetishized manner. Like the three female siblings, Bui Kim Ngan is a very pro-active woman, compared with the Confucian traditional stereotype of the Vietnamese female. The juxtaposition of the traditional and modern Vietnamese female reflects the contradictions arising between traditional and modern Vietnamese culture. Such tension is experienced by the Vietnamese diasporic directors (Roddick: 1999), and by the diaspora more generally.

Hai manifests his Vietnamese traditional values when he tells his sister it is time for her to get married:

> Hai: *Sometimes I wonder...if it isn't time you got married. I'm not kidding. You're old enough.*
>
> Lien: *It's not a bad idea. First of all, I'd to find a man. My ideal would be someone like you...because you're good like Dad.*
>
> Hai: *You really think I'm like him?*
>
> Lien: *Yes, of course. I know you too well. The problem is to find someone who is like you. But what will you do once I'm married? Who'll wash your clothes? Who'll make your meals?*
>
> Hai: *If that's what worries you, I'll manage. I'll do even better that that. At least I won't have to look at your stained panties...next to my clean shirts when you have your period.*

The dialogue between Hai and Lien indicates the love Lien feels for her older brother, and father. Lien both sees in Hai a paternal and attractive male figure. She suffers late-stage form of what Jung identified as the Electra complex. Lien, instead of transferring her libidinal attachment to her father because he is dead, attaches it instead to her brother. Eugene O'Neill has suggested that in the Electra complex, the passion felt for the father can be shifted on to the woman's brother (Huss: 1986). The absence of the father makes Lien emotionally disturbed in a way that seems to be a commentary on the need for a strong father figure, as exemplified by Confucian ethics.

Lien tells Khanh and Suong she is pregnant (Lien and the two sisters later discover she is not, in fact, expecting a child) and Khanh announces that she is also pregnant and suspects Kien has a romance with another woman. The three female siblings are crying about their lives' vicissitudes, one next to the other. However, none of the three women fully knows the private lives of the other sisters. *At the Height of Summer* (2000) ends with Lien and Hai going to their sisters to prepare the celebratory death anniversary lunch of their father. The dishes will be the same. However, the big news is that both Kien and Quoc are going, on this occasion at least, to help the three sisters in the kitchen. From a transgressive life, the three sisters and their husbands have seemingly turned to a more traditional lifestyle. Tran Anh Hung shows the audience how the family has gone from the pretence of respecting traditional values to genuinely doing so. The newly-found peace and harmony is a reflection of this-and the director's- embrace of traditional Vietnamese society.

Compared with Tran Anh Hung's earlier work, *At the Height of Summer* (2000) relies more on dialogues. The film director focuses his attention on female characters and their rebellious attitudes toward the Confucian idea of relationships, and yet, also, as being the

individuals responsible for ensuring the family, and therefore Vietnamese society, survives. In contrast, men are described as individuals to be served and revered but as passive individuals. The women in the films are, however, the ones ruling their lovers' love lives. The director seems therefore to have a very hybridized idea of womanhood, containing both traditional and modern elements, but, overall, leaning towards the former: he does not, in the end, really try and alter the traditional role expected of Vietnamese women. Rather, he updates it a little, 'empowering' them within a traditional setting, but does not really upset the 'natural order' to which he pays homage in his work, even if he acknowledges negative male traits within this cosmos. The challenging moment in the film is when, for the death anniversary of the siblings' father, Quoc and Kien help the sisters prepare the commemorative banquet. The two men actively engage in a family life. The men's cooperation and access to a previously fully-gendered space symbolizes a future harmonious family existence without secrets. This makes the family stronger and thus more Confucian, but paradoxically, in having men in the kitchen, the director is also showing the family unit as shifting a little closer to a Western model where men are expected to perform domestic chores. It is important not to overstate this point: women, for the director, should retain a broadly traditional role: this is very much the key to family stability. However, Tran Anh Hung's hybrid identity does perhaps facilitate a chipping away at the traditional male sphere, hinting that they are equally responsible, and need to make greater efforts, to ensure continued domestic harmony. Relationships are discussed by the director:

> Wood: *At The Height of Summer* seems to hint at the complexity of relationships.
>
> Tran Anh Hung: It certainly focuses on the partial revelation of secrets. For the couples in the film it has to do with desire and infidelity. What interested me was to look at the idea of the couple in the context of Confucius, for example how to communicate to the spectator a difference without too clearly explaining it. In the film, where the photographer tells the truth to his wife, she cries because it

> is painful to her. It is at this moment that I choose to cut. I go back to them only when she is proposing a solution. What I cut is actually very precious in western cinema, that's to say confrontation. In the west confrontation is dynamic, in Asia it is not necessarily so, it is the moment when each characters asks, which part of this pain shall I keep for myself? What I love is to show things that move me and what moves me is that in Vietnam there are men who do nothing and women who do everything. But in Vietnam the women do everything with pleasure, it's the opportunity to talk and discuss sex and men so that's what I show with this film (Wood: 2001).

Tran Anh Hung, as in his previous output, presents the family as a unity under tremendous pressure. In this instance, the family unit is not torn apart by wars or poverty; the constant pressure derives from a traditional Confucian ideology colliding with Vietnamese contemporary life. The same pressure Tran Anh Hung portrays in the film, is experienced by Vietnamese diasporic individuals in their own lives. Living with a liminal identity allows its carriers to shift from one identity to another, while, at the same time, making them feel as if they do not have an identity that can be well-defined. As Khoi argues:

> Being culturally "mixed" can be heart-wrenching at times; we all have had disagreements with our parents because they think we are not "Vietnamese" enough, and we feel; they are too "traditional", on the wrong continent or obscenely anachronistic. But straddling the fence does have its advantages, one of which is allowing us to "see both sides". All of us, whether we are conscious of it or not, have come to embrace a heterogeneous cultural identity, and this hybridization distances us from the strict polarities of "Vietnamese" and "American" cultures. (Khoi: 1993: 322-323).

The tension between, on the one hand traditions and, on the other, rebellious behavior toward Vietnamese Confucian way of living, is felt by the Vietnamese diaspora. This tension between contemporaneity and past culture translates into Tran Anh Hung's short and long films. Indeed, the incongruous nature of the traditional Vietnamese values and the

Vietnamese contemporary life style is what really makes Tran Anh Hung's films diasporic productions.

The Essence of Tran Anh Hung's Films

Both Tran Anh Hung's short films and his feature movies are centered upon the notion of the traditional Vietnamese family. Tarr (2005) noticed that Tran Anh Hung's pivotal 'figure' in his films is the familial network. The family unit, in all his cinematic production, is an entity subjected to stressful conditions. These conditions are dictated by the confluence of war, poverty, and the difficulties inherent in negotiating the gap between Vietnamese traditional Confucian culture and Vietnamese contemporary society. As argued by Ashimoto and Ikels (2005), familial obligations, being the centerpiece of Confucian doctrine, are part of the traditional Vietnamese cosmology. For Tran Anh Hung's films, which show a romanticized Viet Nam, it is essential that families conform, even if imperfectly or hypocritically, to Confucian principles. The family unity, as Tarr (2005) argues, is romanticized. Effectively, the family unit, and especially the female characters of his films are idealized and, in few instances, as with Mui, idolized.

The women are mostly portrayed as being the carriers of the Confucian four virtues (tu duc) consisting of: Cong (housework); Dung (appearance); Ngon (speech- in a sense of moderation in all of its forms); and Hanh (conduct). The four Confucian virtues, according to Ngo (2004), are still expected to be respected in contemporary Viet Nam. In modern Vietnamese society, however, the four precepts have caused strong frictions between the converging roles of the contemporary Vietnamese woman, and the traditional one. These idiosyncrasies between the traditional Vietnamese model of womanhood, and the contemporary one are well illuminated in the films *Cyclo* (1995) and *At the Height of Summer* (2000). Vietnamese women have to adapt to a form of existence based on the structural challenges entailed by the Western capitalistic model, and yet, if they want to be

considered honourable, have to simultaneously subscribe to the Confucian model of womanhood. This dichotomy situates women in a liminal space where womanhood becomes very difficult to mediate.

Tran Anh Hung has written the screenplay for all his cinematic productions; thereby retaining control over the film narrative. His filmic style privileges a highly stylized setting and a multi sensorial space. This has remained true when his mode of production went from being artisanal to industrial. The film director's movies have the capability of making the audience 'feel' Viet Nam. To achieve the synesthetic experience Tran Anh Hung uses, for instance close-ups on food and objects, and fills the shots with extradiegetic and diegetic sounds to amplify the sensorial experience for the audience. Food is important in Tran Anh Hung's filmic productions. The director uses it as a manifestation of the traditional and nostalgic Viet Nam that he imagines. The glossiness, the use of color, the painting-like qualities of each shot and the probing sounds make the films very palatable to an international audience. The use of elliptical narratives, reminiscent of Kieslowski's idea of destiny and humanity, and the intoxicating beauty of his films, mark out Tran Anh Hung's films as belonging to the same European art cinema tradition.

Lam Le

Lam Le is a Franco-Vietnamese film director who was born in Viet Nam in 1950. He went to France to study mathematics, and later studied painting at the Paris Institute of Beaux Arts. He worked as a scenographer and is one of the founders of the *Cartoucherie de Vincennes*. Lam Le got his first break in the film industry in 1975, when Jean-Pierre Mocky asked him to be his assistant for a feature film that he was making. Lam Le's first feature film was released in 1980: *Rencontre des Nuages du Dragon*. In 1981 he shot *Poussiere d'Empire*, the first Western film that gained permission to be shot in Viet Nam. These two works unfortunately remain unavailable on DVD/video. His latest feature film, *20 Nuits et un Jour de Pluie*, was made in 2005. He was Tran Anh Hung's mentor and also has had acting roles in the latter's short films.

20 Nuits & un Jour de Pluie (20 Nights) (2005)

20 Nights (2005) is the third feature film directed by the French-Vietnamese film director and screen writer Lam Le. The film was co-written by Elizabeth D. Inandiak, and was shot in France, Germany and Indonesia. It was financed by various French and German production houses: L'Autre Rivage, Integral Film, Promotion Production Pictures (PPP), Mentor Cinema, Nusa Pilar, CinéCinéma, and Soficinéma. The two main characters (and actors) have a multiethnic identity, Eric Nguyen is French-Vietnamese and Natalia Wörner is French-German. The other film actors are Indonesian. The film is shot in a highly aestheticized manner, with both the actors' bodies and the settings perfectly framed and arranged. In terms of its critical reception, French film critics Danet (2005) and de Baecque (2005) have both stated that the film is very well shot and highly sensual. However, from their perspectives at least, the film does not adequately convey any meaning.

The film narrates the story of a French-German woman living in Java who goes back to Paris to sell her grandmother's flat. For emotional reasons the lady is not able to enter the flat and decides to go and knock on her neighbour's front door. The neighbour is a Vietnamese refugee living in Paris. The two individuals, who are not named, fall in love and spend 20 days and one night of rain having a passionate encounter. The woman then leaves for Java, and the French-Vietnamese man goes to Indonesia to find his beloved woman. The film is a French-German production, set in Paris and Java, and was produced by Integral Film, L'Autre Rivage, and Promotion Production Pictures.

The initial shot of the movie portrays an Asian-looking man in an Asian country. The man is framed walking, looking a little lost, in a street crowded with cyclos and cyclo- drivers

wearing conical straw hats. Because of Lam Le's Vietnamese heritage, the viewer could perhaps be tricked into thinking that the scene is set in Viet Nam. This sequence is interrupted by shots portraying a Western-looking woman looking lost in what appears to be a European city. The woman escapes from the crowd to seek refuge in a quiet side street. The man finds himself in an archeological site where a group of primary school pupils are drawing the Merapi volcano that they can see in the background. Because of the volcano and the monuments with which he is presented, the viewer can now recognize that the Asian land in which the film is set is not in fact Viet Nam.

The school teacher accompanying the pupils to the archeological site shows the pupils the inside of a temple dedicated to the Shiva Linga cult. The teacher explains how the world was created by the union of Linga and Yoni.[69] Lam Le infuses his film with eroticism by framing a medium-length shot on the temple wall which contains representations of voluptuous dancers. The man finds himself in the temple too. While the man is in the Linga and Yoni temple, he has a flashback of a conversation he had with the Western woman in France:

> Man: *Today is very hot. Don't you think so?*
>
> Woman: *I think it's even hotter from where you come from...isn't it?*
>
> Man: *Where, from where I come from? I live here...my home is here...in the center of Paris.*

Lam Le, by making the Asian man remember this woman in that temple establishes the erotic nature of the relation between the Asian man and the Western woman. Importantly, the director is also commenting upon the assumption that an Asian-looking person is seen as

[69] Linga and Yoni are two Dravidic mythological figures. They are represented in Indian, Cambodian, Javanese and Balinese art. Linga is the male element, represented by a cylindrical shaft of stone symbolizing the power of the god. Yoni is a vulva-shaped stone, from where the cylinder rises. Yoni embodies the female power.

inherently and generically Asian. The dialogue between the man and the woman is about identity. In Western societies people having non-Western physical traits are, even today, often considered to be 'from' another country. However, the man considers himself French and he considers Paris to be his home. The disjuncture between physical appearance and nationality is a major marker of difference for diasporic Vietnamese people living in a society where the majority of the individuals have a different appearance. Lam Le comments on his own difficulty in being recognized as French due to his "Asian" appearance:

> While coming back from an exhibition where I was showing my story-boards and a video with my interviews, my son, age six, born in France, asked me a very simple, but very truthful question, as the ones that only kids are able to ask: why, to talk on television, his dad has to pretend to be Chinese.
> Am I French to his child's eyes? I am the one that was the pearl of the French Colonial Empire, and the one who had to learn to speak French. Or have I become French because of living in the heart of the empire? Conceived as the image of his father for the mysteries of genetics (and the Holy Spirit is not far off), a son can see him in the father or can the son see him looking at himself? This is the question which I could not find an answer for, not in mathematics I came to study in France, not in the practice of painting, but in the cinematographic art. This is the only territory where a fabulous mental and physical space does exist, a spiritual and carnal space...(Lam L: 2006).

When the woman goes to her grandmother's flat but cannot enter the door, she then hears the voice of a man speaking in an Asian sounding language. The man is on the phone with his mother. We hear the Vietnamese lady giving her son instructions on how to perform Vietnamese death anniversaries. Lam Le, to express the man's specifically Vietnamese heritage, makes him talk about the most important Vietnamese family celebration: the death anniversary of a close relative, in this particular instance the man's father death commemoration:

Man-talking in Vietnamese: *Sure...an incense stick...a bowl of rice...a bit of rice wine...No. Of course I will remember it. Have I ever forgotten about it? I have been doing it every year since his death. Of course...Are you going to invite all the Saigon relatives? Don't worry. Yes, I have understood.*

[In French, after he sees the woman standing outside his home door] *Three incense sticks. No, I will not forget it. Bye mom.*

The man refers to Ho Chi Minh City as Saigon, calling the Southern Vietnamese city by its pre-Communist name. This is intended to show the character's disconnection from the mother country, and also the director's. Moreover, with his mother, the man speaks French as well as Vietnamese: talking in the language the French used in Viet Nam during the French colonial period. This is an interesting detail that shows the hybrid identity of the Vietnamese started being shaped during the French colonial period. The Vietnamese language and customs had begun to be interlaced with French culture and habits:

Man: *Would you like to dine with me this evening. Like good neighbors...Nothing special! Just some leftovers. And then...if we have nothing to say to each others...you can tell me about Java...I have to say I'd rather dine with you than with my father. No, no. Don't feel guilty...He died ten years ago in Viet Nam...But every year my mother pesters me by phone. She wants me to prepare a banquet on the family's shrine.*

Woman: *What do you prepare?*

Man: Nothing. *Do you believe in this nonsense?*

Woman: *It's your traditions. Not mine.*

Lam Le, by portraying the man inviting the woman for dinner, makes the spectators aware of the interest the French-Vietnamese man has in the exotic Western woman who lives in Java. Lam Le portrays the Vietnamese man as completely rejecting the traditions of his Vietnamese cultural heritage. For his father's death anniversary the man does not prepare him the

offerings that are normal in Vietnamese Confucian tradition. He refers to the Vietnamese rituals for the Vietnamese death anniversaries as gibberish traditions. On the contrary, the Western woman is quite surprised of the rejections of his cultural traditions. By showing the French-Vietnamese man in such terms, La Le is commenting upon the character having a Vietnamese phenotype, but a French genotype, with the notion that the latter is more significant.

However, the man's oral French sometimes seems to fail him, revealing the fact that, despite his efforts to be French, his language reveals he is not French. The man instead of using the French term "chinoiserie"[70] (superstitions) uses the incorrect term "chinoise":

> Man: *My mother every evening pays her respects to my father, on his shrine...Why does she do it, from your point of view?*
>
> Woman: *For love. Might it be so?*
>
> Man: *Yes, it might be for this reason. By the way...I just believe in what I see. Can you lend me a hand? You lay the table...I'll do the rest.*

The man is annoyed his mother performs such obsolete rituals on a daily basis, and chooses to ignore the woman's homage to her dead husband. The man, like Dwayne in *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999), is afraid of compromising his frail French identity by rediscovering his Vietnamese cultural heritage.

The dinner that the French-Vietnamese man serves his neighbour is a typical French dinner. He offers the woman a good bottle of wine but she refuses by saying that she is not used to alcohol. She stares out the window that looks over Notre Dame, and sees the Javanese

[70] Chinoiserie: a French term that refers to an art object whose aesthetic qualities are "Oriental". The word reflects the taste of the imaginary and phantasmatic Orient and its symbols.

volcano Mount Merapi. While the man comments that a drop of wine makes people happy, she says that in Java it is possible to achieve happiness with nothing. The viewer perceives the woman to be more Asian than the Franco-Vietnamese man. The man also tells the woman: "*You don't really look like someone from here...*" Indeed, the Western woman's identity is hybrid: she is half German and half French.

The close-up of the woman's ankle, and the way in which we see the man looking at it, indicates the sensual interest that the French-Vietnamese man feels for the German-French woman. "*If I wasn't so busy with my work project I'd come to dance in Java with you.*" Western audiences are generally used to seeing Westerners have an erotic interest in Asian individuals. On the contrary, Lam Le portrays a Western-mannered Asian-looking man having interest in a Western-looking woman with an exotic personality. The director here is consciously breaking away from the more typical Western narrative whereby the Western male seduces the Oriental female.

The man, however, rediscovers his hybrid identity, while clearing up the kitchen after the woman has gone. The reflection about his Vietnamese cultural heritage is signaled by the use of extradiegetic "Oriental" music.[71] The viewers are immersed in this music and taste the "Oriental" world that the French-Vietnamese man has lost contact with. The music is not specifically Vietnamese but a palatable music that the spectators can easily link to the imaginary "Orient". Lam Le explains that:

> The film sound track has been studied so that it is possible to establish a dialogue among the West and the Orient, and between Viet Nam and Indonesia. They key of this dialogue can be found in the roots of

71 *Who Was She* sang by Vidya Rao and arranged by Cyril Morin. The term Oriental/Orient is used because Lam Le uses Western fantasies of Asia in *20 Nights* (2005).

> names invented by the ethno-geographers to name the new lands they have conquered: the suffix indo, as in Indochina and Indonesia. The music of film has to reveal these little similarities (Lam Le: 2006).

The music, however, more than revealing the similarities between the West and the Orient, and Viet Nam and Java, homogenizes the ideas and sensorial realms that the West thinks of when thinking of Asia. The film director himself uses the term Orient to describe Asian territories, and the fantasies that Westerners attach to them. Lam Le, like the film's French-Vietnamese protagonist, is himself a product of the French exotic vision of Indochina, the lost Oriental colony. The diasporic Vietnamese film director builds an 'Asia' that is as fragrant and sensual as Westerners imagine it to be. Lam Le is himself, much like the film's character, a product of the West who happens to have a Vietnamese ethnic heritage. The film director himself sees 'Asian' refracted through a French cultural prism. However, he is very much conscious of the way he exoticises Asia and, *inter alia*, in his film is arguing that identity is transmutable.

The exoticism of the woman is revealed in the way she puts mosquito nets over the French-Vietnamese man before she goes to sleep, and the appropriation of the man's "Oriental nature" is given by the attraction he has for the mosquito net hanging over his bed: "*I haven't slept under a mosquito net for at least twenty years.*" The French-Vietnamese man sees Asia in the Oriental magical way in which Westerners stereotypically see it. He comments about the woman sleeping under a mosquito net "*I think it is a kind of ...Javanese sortilege*". The woman agrees about the magical and mystical properties of Java that make her want to sleep under a mosquito net even in the malaria free zone of Paris. Again, the director is making the point that identities can shift: a Vietnamese man can become French and a European can become spiritually Asian.

Lam Le frames the mosquito net covered bed, with the woman and man's shadows, in a sensual and stylized way conveying a strong sense of eroticism to the viewers. At the same time, the woman's sensuality is mediated to the viewers by the way in which she talks of Java, with her carnal love for the volcano. Java, the Orient, becomes the medium through which the woman conveys her sexuality. The woman refers to the Merapi volcano as a male identity that she deeply loves. The Orient throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century has been characterized as feminine (Hall: 2000), but here takes a male connotation rather than a female one. It seems clear that the director is purposely trying to turn upside down traditional notions of Asia/identity:

> Woman: *Tell me about your country*
>
> Man: *Of Viet Nam? It's so far away that I cannot really talk about it...*
>
> Woman: *Tell me about France, then...*
>
> Man: *France is like a body...a large body with its own colonies. France does not send its army in its colonies... It was its body that was sent. It was that body...that the colonized people had to swallow down...so they could become the offspring...of this overseas mother. I am that body ... I live... I get nourished ...I believe like you, in the generosity of this country. I do not miss anything here. My body...it's the only good that remains of my country. I am a unique body with France.*

The carnality with which the male and the woman talk about what they consider their home country enables the viewer to actually feel the corporeal properties of France and Java. France has the delicate nature of a mother with her child; Java has the savage and quivering sensuality of the Orient. The French-Vietnamese man's dialogue perpetrates the French colonial discourse on Indochina for which France is the benevolent mother watching over its colonies. Furthermore, his ideological realm contains the binary opposition which links the French power as a good motherly one, and the Vietnamese Communist Government as a bad protectorate.

The diasporic Vietnamese man feels profoundly French, and considers his physical body the only part of his identity that is connected with Viet Nam. The man's conversation hints at his dislike for contemporary Vietnamese politics. However, he does not miss traditional Vietnamese Confucian values and just longs for the return of French colonial power in Viet Nam. France gives the Asian man the freedom that would have been denied in Viet Nam. He does not idealize Viet Nam, nor does he romanticize his former home country. He is simply happy to be French, so it seems. However, hidden behind the man's books there are in fact signs of his Vietnamese heritage, objects from Viet Nam. The woman discovers concealed traces of Viet Nam all over the man's house. These visible marks of Viet Nam do in fact celebrate the French colonial invasion of Indochina. The picture framed by Lam Le displays a young Vietnamese man being held on his father's shoulders for the fourteen of July celebration. The Man says: "*It was my first 14 July in Viet Nam, on my father's shoulders.*"

The dream the Vietnamese man has during the night, and the association the woman makes between the man and a primitivist painting, are symbolic of the ideas the two have about each other. The French-Vietnamese man dreams that the woman is his school mistress and he touches her knee. The German-French woman is both an authoritarian colonial figure and the site of exoticism and sensuality. The woman, in turn, connects the smiling face of the sleeping man to a Gauguin painting called *The Spirit of Death*. The picture shows a Tahitian woman sleeping on a bed, the Oriental and exotic beauty of Gauguin's model is transferred to the Vietnamese diasporic man. Polynesia, like Viet Nam, was a French colony, and the woman commenting "*It's your hidden savagery that makes you so unique*" reinforces the colonial discourse that makes the Orient appear as feminine and savage. The French-Vietnamese man embodies the colonial fantasies of the German-French woman: he is

perceived as being a male with an intrinsic femininity. The Frenchness that man has embraced is, for the other, inhibited by his physical appearance, about which the woman keeps reminding him. The 'orchidaceous' look of the Vietnamese diasporic man is what makes him so palatable to the German-French woman. The woman is so enchanted by the Orient that plays with flowers petal talcum powder[72], silk and palm leaves. She asks the man if he has any exotic fruits such as pineapple, lychee, anona and star fruit, symbolic, in the Western conception, of the Oriental lust and sensuality. The woman, being away from Java, still wants to taste it; she both ingurgitates it, and, at the same time, has Proustian memories of her Oriental paradise.

The French-Vietnamese man's carnal appetite for the woman is expressed by the way that Lam Le frames him sucking her bleeding finger. The camera moves around the French-Vietnamese man's flat; it does not frame the couple making love, but there are the extradiegetic sounds of their carnal experience. The extradiegetic voice of the woman narrates, with a very ambiguous language that speaks of Java and its volcano, and which is used as a metaphor for her sexual experiences. The shots of the Man's flat cut to frame a Javan volcano whose crater is fuming.

> Woman: *I waited for months...for him to come down to me. Yet, he already loved me. He comes to me for me to get down on him. And when I did it...in those nights...it was absolute happiness. A celebration of love. I could hear his heavy breath caressing my stomach.*

The association between nature, exoticism, and sensuality are used to describe the Orient and carnal pleasures symbolic of the colonial values attached to the woman's ideology. The

[72] Flower petals and talcum powder form part of the decadent imagery that Westerners have had about Asian ways of living.

exotic eroticism that the German-French woman feels for the dangerous Merapi volcano is shifted onto her love for the Oriental male. The French-Vietnamese man and the Javanese male both save and nurture her. As Chiu has noted:

> As exotic figures of the "Other" in European art and literature, the native woman is no stranger to be regarded, indeed constructed, as the object of male Orientalist gaze/desire/consumption (Chiu:2005:139)

In the film, it is the Oriental man, however, who is the site of the female's Orientalist gaze/desire and consumption. The Western female exotic staring at the Asian sensual male makes Lam Le's film so different from the other diasporic Vietnamese movies, where the exotic woman is generally looked at from a male perspective. The Oriental male is at her service. Lam Le shows the analogies between the diasporic Vietnamese man and the Javanese male. They both give her their clothes and they make her tea. By offering the Western woman tea[73], the Oriental male is offering her part of the Asian life style the woman wants to incorporate. The erotic relationship between the woman and the Javanese man, monitoring Java's biggest volcano, is symbolized by their previous meeting, albeit unobserved by the woman, at the *Butuh Cinta* rocks (the stones of love). The German-French woman's sensorial perception of Java is based upon Javanese mythology and her contact with Javanese natural world.

The dream-like world the German-French woman inhabits breaks down when pain appears. The ache the French-Vietnamese man feels in his ankle makes the woman panic: she goes onto the man's balcony reciting to herself Grimm's tale of Rumpelstiltskin. The woman has constantly been immersed in a fantasy world to escape the reality, and "*When faced with*

[73] Tea is grown in both Indonesia and Viet Nam.

sufferance, there is not remedy but silence. Silence it is the only remedy". The silence that the Western woman chooses to adopt, in order to escape from sorrow, means ignoring a non-fictionalized life. After the death of her French grandmother she went to Indonesia to find the mysticism which would remind her of the fabulous stories her grandmother told the women when she was a child. The German-French woman finds in Java the oneiric world she lost. The extreme close-up on the Javanese marionettes, and the extradiegetic music of the *gamelang*[74], marks the female main character's return to her childhood enchanted memories:

> Woman: *The thing I thought would be a very far away exile, in reality, was a way of finding myself. I went away without knowing that in Java I would have found the submerged tropics of my childhood. And there, in front of my eyes, the dance of the charming princes' souls...of the giants, and mermaids...of the mart pixies...and of the white crocodiles...of the time that once emerged from my grandmother's mouth.*

Java and the Oriental man offer the German-French woman the possibilities to escape from the pain of the world. The phantasmatic world the woman is seeking is enclosed in her body. The French-Vietnamese man, after various attempts at drawing the volcano, designs its silhouette to mirror the woman's breasts, finally getting the right shape. The exotic sensorial qualities of the Merapi and the French-Vietnamese man are transferred to the woman's body in the effort to transfer onto her physicality the Oriental quintessence. The man's bed has become a sensual Oriental bed surrounded by the Asian fragrance of a burning incense stick, exotic fruit and drink. The Asianness she is seeking is squeezed off the French-Vietnamese man; the man starts dreaming in Vietnamese. In his dream he says *Tin a minh* that from Vietnamese into English translates as "seeking refuge."The close-ups and extreme close-ups on the French-Vietnamese man's body make him effeminate and sensual to the viewer. The

[74] *Gamelang*: percussion musical instrument typical of central Java.

gaze of desire is reposed in the Oriental male's body. Lam Le makes the Asian body the site of desire, but, rather than the usual female body, it is the male's physique at which we gaze: the audience experiences the sensual nature of the male body. This attempt at 'subverting' the classical Western construct is symbolic of the diasporic director's hybridity: his narrative contains 'Western' elements but these are consciously reshaped.

Lam Le seeks similarities between Viet Nam and Indonesia through the whole film. The Film director chose to shoot the film in Java because of its historical, political and religious similarities with Viet Nam:

> The Java portrayed in the film it is not a touristy destination, but a raft where two lovers find refuge between Occident and Asia, and vice-versa. Java is the cultural cradle of Indonesia. It is composed of millions of islands of different ethnicities.
>
> Between Java and Viet Nam there are historical links, ethnic, cultural and spiritual. The Southern part of Viet Nam in the tenth century was part of the Champa kingdom, vassal of Java's King. The temples of Linga-Yoni, one of which was shot in the film, do exist in Viet Nam too. However, they are in a terrible state because the Shiva cult has been eclipsed and replaced by the Confucian-Buddhist one, much more austere and prudish.
>
> The same animistic beliefs do exist between the two countries. The Javanese keep venerating the volcano as the Vietnamese do because they know that their soil is the most fertile in the whole world, but one day the volcano will destroy everything. Everything that the film tells about the volcano it is part of the contemporary cultural and spiritual Javanese reality... And after all Java and Viet Nam can perfectly reflect each others in the mirror for the anti-colonial mourning: Soekarno and Ho Chi Minh, two emblematic figures that ended, one in 1949 after three centuries of Dutch colonization, and the other in 1954, after a century of French colonization. Apart from Java no other country can be the same as Viet Nam (Lam Le: 2005).

The similarities between the two countries are shown even in regards to traditional medicine's *coa gio*[75] technique. The extradiegetic Asian music, and the intense, bright, and warm color of the silk tapestries and cushions make Lam Le's shots very Oriental-looking. The shots, in terms of color and compositions, resemble the paintings of Gerard Pieter Adolfs. The audience, confronted with such sensorial images, can feel the decadency and fragrance of the Orient. Lam Le portrays "The Orient" within the same paradigm as has traditionally been the case in Western thought. The hybrid nature of the director emerges out of the narrative from which he constructs Asia.

Affinities between the film's imagery and Western art can be seen. In particular, Gerard Pieter Adolfs' Orientalism-infused work seems influential: *Nude Study* (1933) has features similar to the bodily structure of the German-French woman. The stylized movements of the female character are similar to the pose of the woman portrayed by Adolfs. *The Rice Harvest* (1964) recalls the Javanese votive procession that Lam Le frames climbing up the Merapi to give their offerings. *20 Nights* (2005) shots are so calibrated that each shot resembles a painting. Lam Le frame's composition is very similar, in that it pays attention to details and constructs the surroundings in a highly stylized manner. Such similarities between Western art and the film are themselves a manifestation of the director's hybrid identity: he has an Asian body, can speak Vietnamese, but is culturally predominantly a product of the West.

The German-French woman seeks refuge in the phantasmatic Asian world to forget her tumultuous past: when small she had a depressed mother, an alcoholic father interested in prostitutes; when the woman became an adult, she worked as a prostitute. The West reminds

[75] *Coa gio*: coin rubbing. This is a form of dermo-abrasive therapy, common in South East Asia, used to relieve a variety of illnesses.

the German-French woman of her brutal past; therefore she finds shelter in the Asianness of the French-Vietnamese man:

> Woman: *The first evening I was here, after having had dinner with you, outside my flat's door, I thought that Java cancelled everything. Java cancelled nothing.*

The unpoetic manner in which the woman perceives the West cannot be abandoned outside of the Orient. The bracelet the woman wears is a reminder to her of the love she find on the volcano, the fear she felt, the exoticism of Java and death. Lam Le uses small objects as a key to accessing memories, and the sensations associated with such reminiscences. Lam Le's shots taken in the Carmelite convent, with the close-up of the luxuriant vegetation and the life in the undergrowth, are symbolic of the fragmented identity of the German-French woman. The close ups on vegetation and insects also recalls Tran Anh Hung film *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993).

On the fourteenth of July, the French National Day, the French-Vietnamese man awakens and finds the German-French woman has left. However, her presence is still in the house. The French-Vietnamese man has made contact with his Asian side thanks to her. On his bookshelf there is now a space used as a shrine for his deceased father, where offerings of fruit, wine, incense sticks, and candles are given. Lam Le focuses on the modern shrine. The typical Vietnamese offerings, consisting of rice and rice wine, have been substituted by a more contemporary and French influenced style. The Oriental dream is becoming predominant in the life of the French-Vietnamese man. The prophecy of the female main character, that one day he will go to Java, the Orient, becomes true:

> Man (to the German-French woman): *Why should I go to Java? I feel good here...with you.*

Woman: *You will go. I am sure of it. Yes, you will come that far. And you will see what we have built together, you and me.*

The sibylline manner in which the female character vocally expresses herself helps Lam Le in creating her exotic personality. The last part of the film is set in Java where the French-Vietnamese man goes to find his lover. In Java the French-Vietnamese man is confronted with questions about the way he looks and about his nationality. The Asian bodily figure and the French nationality make the French-Vietnamese man a peculiar individual, even in Java. The Asians are surprised as Western people are to hear that he is French:

Javanese teacher: *Oh, sorry. Where do you come from?*

Man: *France.*

Javanese teacher: *Really from France? Which part of France?*

Man: *Viet Nam.*

The Indonesia the French-Vietnamese man experiences is a very glossy version of Java, consisting of pleasant and graceful women and a lush landscape. The Java portrayed by Lam Le does not differ much from the one painted by Gerard Pieters Adolf. However, after the initial surprise the hybrid identity of the French-Vietnamese man is recognized by the Javanese woman; the Javanese teacher calls him "*Mister from France-Viet Nam*". The male main character discovers the similarities between Java and Viet Nam, cultural and culinary ones. He is offered a typical Indonesian drink called *sin sao*, also traditional in Viet Nam and called *song sao*. As he says, "*Indonesia...Indochina, it's funny how close we are.*" Lam Le uses the plot device of making the French-Vietnamese man and the Javanese teacher's husband both break their legs in similar circumstances to escape the dictatorial regimes in both Indonesia and Viet Nam:

Man: *Why does your husband limp?*

Javanese woman: *He broke his leg by himself to skip the army of the Suharto dictatorship. Do you know who Suharto was?*

Man: *You know...I broke my leg as well, like your husband, to classify for political asylum in France.*

This dialogue of political similarities, both men wanting to avoid the political regime in Viet Nam and Indonesia, between Java and Viet Nam concludes the film. The signs of escaping, like the signs of bodily pleasures through the film, become incorporated as bodily experience.

Lam Le's *20 Nights* (2005) contains the elements that, according to Naficy's (2001) parameters, make the film a diasporic movie. The hybrid nature of the film is shown by the multiple languages spoken: English, French, German, Javanese and Vietnamese, with Italian and French subtitles. Lam Le's film is about a number of things. Firstly, it is a home coming journey for the German-French woman who is going back to France, but when she arrives in her home country she feels so lost that she becomes homeless and finds refuge in the Oriental nature of the French-Vietnamese man. It is also a home coming journey for the French-Vietnamese man. However, the man does not go back to Viet Nam but searches for his lost Asian identity in Java.

Lam Le, like Tran Anh Hung, portrays the traditional family unit as being under tremendous pressure, and in the case of the German-French woman, as being non- existent. Furthermore, they reach the same conclusions about whether this is a bad thing. The French-Vietnamese man lives away from his family, has no children and is divorced from his wife. The female main character is completely without familial ties: she lives on her own in Java and she has no family in France or Germany. The film blends historical fact and Javanese mythology. Lam Le uses myths to make Java amplify the Oriental image he wants to project.

A manner of achieving this is by having the German-French woman, in comparison to the Javanese teacher, tell the myths in a very sensual manner and in very sensual circumstances. The film director did not shoot *20 Nights* (2005) in Viet Nam because, he says, after shooting *Poussiere d'Empire* (1983) in Viet Nam:

> I have understood that it is not possible making a film in a dictatorship, if the film does not fit in the dictatorial ideology. All the ideas about shooting a film in Viet Nam have become illusory and vain (Lam Le: 2005).

The possibility of freedom of expression is what makes Lam Le set his films outside of his ancestral country. The imagined Oriental mental space which the German-French woman and the French-Vietnamese man try to recreate is the nostalgic, romantic and imagined space in which Lam Le positions Viet Nam.

Lam Le has criticized Tran Anh Hung, in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), for presenting a film that portrays the Vietnamese in a predictable fashion (Tarr: 2005: 153). However, *20 Nights* (2005), in spite of inverting an element of the traditional Western approach to Asia, nonetheless portrays Asia as the 'Orient' that the Western public expects to see in an art film about South East Asia. Lam Le, in *20 Nights* (2005), uses a cinematographic style similar to Tran Anh Hung. Furthermore, the former pays the same attention to the setting as Tran Anh Hung does. Lam Le uses an elliptic narrative in his film; the viewers notice the similar narrative structure, and image composition in both Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung's works. The two French-Vietnamese film directors both use dialogue very sparingly. Both Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung romanticize Asia by transforming it into the Orient. An Orient that does not shock the Western audience and that, at the same time, make the

characters' ancestral land look like the romantic place where diasporic Vietnamese people can dream of their lost mother country.

Summary

Both Franco-Vietnamese film directors can be described as having a post-colonial view of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese. Their films often bear traces of the French colonial legacy in Indochina as they capitulate to certain imperialist tropes and racialized phantasie. While Tran Anh Hung eroticizes the 'Vietnamese traditional woman', Lam Le focuses on the 'exotic Vietnamese male'. There are no substantial differences in moving the gaze from a Vietnamese woman to an exilic Vietnamese man living in Paris. The Vietnamese main characters are sites of ethnic sensuality and voluptuousness. Vietnamese women recreate a nostalgic Viet Nam past by preparing Vietnamese food. Lam Le's principal male character also rejects, and later incorporates, his Vietnameseness through food consumption. Food- and the practices associated with it- are highly symbolic, and erotic, in the movies of French-Vietnamese filmmakers. Both directors make the exotic female and the male characters accept these roles without question. Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung eroticize Viet Nam and the Vietnamese.

History is certainly not central to these directors' movies, but is substituted with a "colonial" nostalgia of Viet Nam during the French occupation. Indeed, neither director seriously addresses the controversies of French colonial power in Indochina. While the two directors set their films in both the pre- and post-American-Vietnamese conflict periods, a common theme is perceived: a focus on how the way of life of the Vietnamese individual has been affected by the experiences of French colonization and the American-Vietnamese conflict. Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung do not present an overly political picture of Viet Nam's recent past; where they reference the French colonial period and American-Vietnamese conflict at all, it is a fairly oblique manner through the use of objects – for example the

Western style trousers worn by the Master in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) or the picture showing the Man in *20 Nights* (2005) with his father during the fourteenth of July celebration in Viet Nam. Furthermore, their films neither criticize nor acclaim the Vietnamese Government. Rather, the two film directors' main focus is the re-imagining of Viet Nam in a very romantic and melancholic manner typical of the sense of nostalgia expressed in post-colonial cinema. Both film directors are primarily interested in giving the audience a synesthetic experience of what they imagine and interpret as Viet Nam and the Vietnamese.

VIII

Identity in American-Vietnamese Film

This chapter provides a close-reading of the films made by Vietnamese-American film directors Chi Muoi Lo, Tony Bui, Timothy Linh Bui, Victor Vu and Ham Tran. The films analyzed are those which are available to the general public on either DVD or VHS format. I have excluded the film *Thế Giới Huyền Bí "Tình Yêu Bất Diệt"* (2006) (*Mysterious World Episode 1: Love never Dies*) by Victor Vu, because it is not a feature film, but, rather, part of a film anthology series specifically concerned with supernatural themes. As in the previous chapter, the film analysis pays attention to five main elements: how the Vietnamese film director affirms/reinforces/denies/reflects upon his diasporic Vietnamese identity; the role of the family in Vietnamese diasporic films; the symbolic function of food; the use of objects in recreating Viet Nam and reinforcing the film directors diasporic identity; the representation of the Vietnamese body.

The chapter is divided by director and, where relevant, sub-divided by film. It looks at films made by Vietnamese- American film directors between 1999 and 2006. *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999) by Chi Muoi Lo was the first American-Vietnamese film to be commercially available. This is the first film to be analyzed in this chapter. *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999) is both set and shot in America, in the state of California. The Vietnamese-American movie focuses on the life of two Vietnamese orphans who were adopted by a black American couple, but who, as young adults, then find their Vietnamese biological mother. Chi Muoi Lo's film focuses on the problem arising from an identity which does not correspond to stereotypical somatic traits. The next film, *Three Seasons* (1999) by Tony Bui is, in contrast, set and shot in Viet Nam, and focuses on showing the life of the

Vietnamese in a post-American-war Viet Nam. The film director explores life on the poor fringe of Vietnamese society. Timothy Linh Bui's film *Green Dragon* (2001) is set in America. This production explores the home-seeking journeys, displacement experiences and family fragmentation, suffered by Vietnamese refugees during the American-Vietnamese conflict. *First Morning* (2003) by Victor Vu was shot entirely in California. The film explores the traumatic experiences, endured by the Vietnamese boat people and how they adapted to life in the United States. Victor Vu's second feature film, *Spirits* (2006) is divided into three interconnected stories. The film director emphasizes the betrayal and violence to which Vietnamese women have been subjected throughout history. The final film in this chapter, *Journey from the Fall* (2006), was shot in the United States and Thailand. It is a film that presents the viewers with a post-war Viet Nam. Ham Tran narrates the vicissitudes-torture, abuse, family fragmentation and displacement - endured by a formerly high-ranking official of the Southern Vietnamese Army who is imprisoned in a reeducation camp, while his family escapes from Viet Nam to seek refuge into the United States.

Catfish in Black Bean Sauce (1999)

Chi Muoi Lo is the screen writer, producer, actor, and film director of the film *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999). Chi Muoi Lo was born in Viet Nam, of Chinese heritage. In 1975, he and his family left Viet Nam by boat and were sent to the Fort Indiantown Gap Refugee Camp in Pennsylvania. Chi Muoi Lo's family was sponsored by the Jewish League of America and moved to Philadelphia. He studied acting at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre. The film was shot in the United States, and was produced by Stanley Yung and Black Hawk Entertainment. The cast features Chi Muoi Lo himself and an ensemble of Afro-American, Caucasian American, Vietnamese, and American-Vietnamese actors. Notwithstanding the multi-ethnic performers, the film can be characterized as a typical American romantic comedy. Ebert (2000) described the films as "a first draft for a movie that could have been extraordinary".

Catfish in Black Bean Sauce (1999), his only feature film as director to date, narrates the story of two Vietnamese siblings, Mai and Dwayne (Sap is his Vietnamese name) brought-up by an Afro-Californian couple called Dolores and Harold. Harold is a former Viet Nam veteran. Dwayne is engaged with an Afro-American girl called Nina. He lives with his flat mate Michael. Mai is married to Vinh, an American-Vietnamese refugee business man who earns his living by organizing seminars about how to become rich. Mai has found her and Dwayne's birth mother, Thannh, and has arranged for the Vietnamese woman to arrive in California in a week's time. The news hits the family in different ways. Dolores develops a sudden jealousy and Dwayne is not pleased by the arrival of his birth mother. Indeed, the meeting with the haughty, critical, and Vietnamese woman will turn upside-down the life of the whole America-Afro-Vietnamese family.

In the film there is a parallel story-line about Michael, Dwayne's roommate, and his Chinese transsexual partner, Samantha. The film is set in the middle-class suburbs of California. The film is mostly set in Dolores and Harold's home, in Vinh and Mai's house, and in Dwayne and Michael's detached house. A few transnational places are also presented in the film such as an airport and a hospital, and there is a clear reference to the Vietnamese diaspora's place *per antonomasia*, Little Saigon, in Orange County, California. The film, in contrast to the Franco-Vietnamese cinematic productions, is not aesthetically stylized. Chi Muoi Lo too frames his characters using mostly medium long shots, and long shots.

The film's opening shots show Dwayne at his adoptive parents, playing cards. Each character has a can of Pepsi next to them. The film director makes the environment where the Williams live very American. The conversation is centered on a newly acquired female cat, according to Dolores an old and fat one, that Harold has rescued from the streets. Dolores is trying to re-home the blind feline and asks Dwayne if the wants to adopt it. The style in which the conversation is staged resembles an American sit-com. To be more precise, it resembles, in style, *The Cosby Show*'s dialectic performances.[76] The audience, by observing the way Dwayne, Harold and Dolores interact with each-other, begin to define the characters. Harold is a good and quiet man. He saves the blind cat from the street and christens it Jasmine; Dolores is a talkative and spicy woman; Dwayne is a young man unsure of himself, suffering from paranoiac behavior.

There is always a comic element accompanying the manner in which the characters are presented. While Dwayne wants to propose to Nina, he is interrupted by his flat mate going home with Samantha. Moreover, while Dwayne and Nina are driving together they are

[76] This was an American sit-com running from 1984 to 1992, starring Bill Cosby.

stopped by a black policeman for breaking the speed limit. The policeman lets him go because he sees the engagement ring Dwayne has in his pocket for Nina. In these initial shots, Chi Muoi Lo utlises all the stereotypical elements found in American television films to describe the life of this middle class American family.

The American life and identity the characters have is represented by the cultural habits they have. The William's family has invited Dwaine and Nina for lunch and they are having a barbeque. Nina, being good looking and attentive to her health, is framed with a can of *Diet Coke* placed next to her. The characters are framed having frivolous conversations. The effect of such dialogues is to amuse the viewer. In the middle of the nonsensical conversation Dwayne asks Nina to marry him. Dwayne's timid personality shows itself when he tells Nina, after she has said yes to the proposal: "*I hope you said yes because you love me and not because you are on the spot.*" When Mai arrives at her adoptive parents' home, she has a special announcement to give:

> Dolores: *God, she's having a baby.*
>
> Mai: *I did it. I found Ma. We have been writing back and forth for a while now. I just got another letter. I arranged to bring her to the States. She'll be here within a week.*
>
> Nina: *Wow, that's great.*
>
> Dolores: *I thought you stopped looking.*
>
> Mai: *Thank God I didn't.*
>
> Harold: *Good news, Mai.*
>
> Dwayne: *What about Pa?*
>
> Mai: *He died in the camp.*

The audience, through Dolores and Mai's expressions immediately perceive that there is friction between the adoptive mother and daughter. However, Harold is pleased that his

adoptive daughter was able to track down her birth mother. Dolores, more for a comical effect, is framed running away screaming in despair. Harold, in his usual calm and polite manners, hugs Mai. Dwayne, however, conveys the director's main intentions here: he asks what happened to his father who Mai says died in a Vietnamese reeducation camp. Chi Muoi Lo wants to make sure that the audience is aware of the often terrible situations that Vietnamese dissident people experienced after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Dolores has a flashback of a young Mai in an English class for refugee Vietnamese children. The Vietnamese teacher is surprised to see that Mai's parents are Afro-Americans. The director uses language to evoke this perceived cultural incongruity. The Vietnamese teacher, instead of calling Dolores' husband Harold, understands his name is hemorrhoid!

> Dolores: *Come on baby, it's time to go. Mai...Mai...We have to get going. Come on, Mai.*
>
> Mai (raising her voice, in Vietnamese): *You're not my mother!*

The above quote illustrates that the relationship between the two women has been conflictual since Mai was a child. However, the audience is not given a reason why Mai does not like Dolores. Dolores gets very hurt by her adopted daughter's behavior. Mai holds Harold's hand and leaves the class room. On the contrary, Dwayne has expressed his love towards Dolores since he was a child. Dolores has a flashback of her young adopted son: the American Vietnamese child is kept in custody by the security of a shop, and Dolores goes to get him. As soon as he sees her, he says "Mama" and hugs her. The security officers, both black, are very surprised by see an Afro-American woman being the mother of an Asian looking boy. The same puzzled expression appears on the American language teacher's face when he sees that Mai's parents are black. Chi Muoi Lo is persistent in showing how perplexed people appear when they see this cross-ethnic family. It is generally expected that Asian or White

people become adoptive parents of Vietnamese children without parents or relatives, definitely not black people. Depicting an ethnic group which has itself been, historically, the recipient of extreme discrimination as adopting someone belonging to an American ethnic minority is an unusual approach for the director to take.

Dwayne is a bank manager at the Freeman Bank[77], a bank whose customers are black, the employees also being of African descent too. Dwayne lives the life of a black American. He does not have cultural roots that attach him to his Vietnamese cultural background. The film director emphasizes the discomfort African-American people had in seeing Harold and Dolores being the adoptive parents of two Vietnamese children. Dolores is shocked that the siblings adopted by her and Harold are about to see their natural mother. She is scared that Mai and Dwayne will abandon their adoptive parents. Dwayne has a flashback of a reception, after the Sunday mass, in which two black ladies comment about the sin that the Williams committed in adopting two children not belonging to their cultural sphere. As the Lady in White says, "*You look at this poor baby, he need to be with his own.*"

The film director, by showing Harold and Dolores' cosmopolitanism, remarks upon the racial prejudices still, in his view, present in American society. African-Americans are supposed to stay among themselves; the Vietnamese refugees *for their own health*, should live in a community of Asian ancestry. The two ladies gossip on Dolores condition that does not allow her to have a child. The unpleasant situation finishes in laughter because the younger Dwayne pulls off the fat lady's top. Chi Muoi Lo's ability of transforming hostile situation into comical ones does not fully allow the viewer to appreciate the racism some members of the black American community feel towards the Vietnamese refugees mixing

[77] The Freeman Bank was set up in 1865 in the Southern states, to help the former slaves and black Civil War soldiers to save money. The bank customers are descent of the bank depositors. To be a client of the bank it is necessary to be descendant of the bank depositors.

with them. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) argues that ethnicities and tribal customs should not trespass the borders of someone's homeland. In adopting the Vietnamese children, the Williams have done this and are therefore criticized by members of their own community.

Mai and Vinh talk Vietnamese at home. However, Dwayne speaks American with his sister, Vinh does the same too. Dwayne's Afro-American identity is expressed through the back American colloquial language he choses to adopt and through his musical tastes. He mostly listens to black rap. Dawyne's idea of Vietnam is shown in the way he imagines his birth mother. In his mind, the two siblings, with Dolores and Vinh are waiting at the airport. The Vietnamese woman, lacking grace and dressed in what would be considered a tacky style, rushes towards her son and daughter. The initial tears on seeing them soon disappear when she tells them she met a "loaded" American on the plane. She introduces Douglas to Mai and Dwayne by telling him they are her niece and nephew from the States. She then leaves the family to go out with her new American friend for dinner. The idea Dwayne has of his mother is clearly typical of the Western stereotype which implies that Vietnamese women coming to the States do it for economic reasons. Being reunited with their families, and indeed love, is secondary to money. The idea that Dwayne's natural mother could have such inappropriate behavior makes him refuse to bring Dolores to the airport, greatly offending her.

However, when the day comes to go to the airport all the Williams and Vinh are waiting for the Vietnamese woman at the airport. The film director fills this emotional occasion with humor. Mai runs towards a Vienamese woman with tears of happiness and hugs her. The woman is not her mother but a Vietnamese middle aged lady wearing traditional Vietnamese clothes. Mai's birth mother appears by screaming "Mai" from very far

away. Thanh's reaction is loud and over the top. Vietnamese women are perceived as very reserved in showing their emotions and such behavior would usually be inappropriate if thought of in terms of Vietnamese traditional culture's female virtues.[78] Thanh is very partial towards Dwayne, who she calls Sap. The first thing she asks Mai is: "*My son! I want to see my little boy.*" Dwayne's reaction in seeing his birth mother is very detached. He wants to shake her hand. However, Thanh hugs him and starts crying out loud. Vinh gives her a bunch of flowers but the Vietnamese woman is completely indifferent to him. Mai then introduces Thanh to her adoptive parents, in Vietnamese. "*Ma, this is Dolores and Harold. They're the couple that raised us*". The viewers know that the Vietnamese woman is going to be a hostile character because of her insistence in ignoring everyone but Mai and Dwayne. Mai praises the Williams, about having been so lucky in finding an adoptive parent such Harold.

Thanh then briefly talks of the horrors brought by the Communist regime after the American-Vietnamese conflict. Vinh translates what the woman says:

> *In the years in Viet Nam were not easy because of the children's father's involvement in the American Embassy. I was put in jail after the war. I was lucky I was not killed. After the war I was put in a camp for re-education. They were treated like animals...starved, beat... She saw many of her friends die or go mad. I don't know what...I think I was able to survive to the hope that one day I will be able to see and hold my children again.*
>
> Vinh: *Mai told us...Mai told us that the father died in the camp.*
>
> Thanh: *Died in the camp? He didn't die in the camp. He died choking on a fish bone.*

Harold, Mai and Vinh are surprised and embarrassed that Thanh's husband did not die in a dramatic manner. Chi Muoi Lo choice of making the siblings' father die of such a banal cause is interesting: it informs the audience that not every single Vietnamese died because of

[78] Especially the *Ngoc* virtue stating that women should refrain from showing intense emotions (Ngo: 2004)

the laws enforced by the Vietnamese Communist regime. The Western audience expects Vietnamese dissidents to always die to causes attributable to their opposition to the Vietnamese Government. Mai romanticizes the death of her father in order to dramatize her Vietnamese family's history, much like diasporic film makers narrate the plight of Vietnamese refugees.

The dislike Thanh feels from Dolores becomes evident when they all gather for dinner. Dolores say: "*For Thanh's arrival I've prepared an authentic Chinese meal: egg rolls, salted shrimps in their shells, and catfish in black bean sauce.*" Dolores welcomes Thanh by preparing what she considers to be Vietnamese traditional dishes; moreover she proposes a toast for Thanh: "*Welcome to America, we are very happy you are with us.*" The Vietnamese woman, however, is portrayed as being hostile towards the black people with whom she dines. She has a look of disapproval in watching Nina and Dwayne interacting together. Moreover, Thanh makes a very derogatory comment towards the food that Dolores has cooked:

> Mai [in Vietnamese]: *Ma, how do you like it?*
>
> Thanh: *It reminds me of the camp.*
>
> Mai [to the family, in English]: *She likes it.*

Chi Muoi Lo frames a bottle of fish sauce with a close-up. Consuming *nuoc nam* is like consuming Vietnamese culture and identity. The Vietnamese woman puts it on her food in order, symbolically, to state her belonging and identification with Vietnamese culture.

> Dolores: *What's that?*
>
> Mai: *It's a special sauce, nuoc nam. It's very popular in Viet Nam.*

Dolores: *Oh, it's like Vietnamese ketchup. I'd like to try some.*

Everyone tries it, except Dwayne. He clearly does not want to taste anything that is going to make him Vietnamese. He stops Nina from having the sauce too. Both Dolores and Harold do not like the Vietnamese fish sauce but they still eat it. Food preference and attitudes toward it convey messages of pleasure or dislike towards people and different culture. The title of the film is taken from the main course in the meal Dolores prepares for Thanh. During this feast tensions develops between characters and the stress reveals itself in the way they eat. The meal symbolizes the strain between cross cultural identities and the stereotypes attached to them. Chi Muoi Lo's merit is to represent Vietnamese culture without romanticizing Vietnamese traditional cultural values. This is in strong contrast to how other diasporic Vietnamese directors represent Vietnamese people in very nostalgic terms. Chi Muoi Lo, however, does not present the viewers with any nostalgic feeling about Viet Nam. The only character romanticizing Thanh is Mai. However, even she soon understands that there is nothing nostalgic, romantic, or maternal about her birth mother. Furthermore, she discovers that her identity is closely connected to the Afro-American one in which she was brought up with.

Thanh is determined to spend time with her son Dwayne, and insists in wanting to leave with her son. Dwayne is completely reluctant to spend time with his mother and refuses to understand or speak Vietnamese. The Vietnamese refugee is not too willing to hybridize his Afro-American identity; he does not feel any attachment to Viet Nam. He refuses to understand his birth mother calling him Sap. Dwayne resents his natural mother for not being at the American Embassy during the Fall of Saigon, when his father had to go looking for

her. Dwayne and Mai were left on their own and brought to the United States without their parents:

> Dwayne: *What am I supposed to do? Taking care of her? She dropped out of nowhere. Am I supposed to act as some loving son? Where was she when I needed her? It's her fault my father is not here. Where was she? She should have been there with us. He wouldn't have left us alone. Me and Mai were so scared sitting there at the Embassy waiting for him to find her. Look, it was so quick me and Mai decided what to do. He promised to be back. He promised. And now she wants to be my mother?*

Chi Muoi Lo uses some autobiographical elements during the film. He and his family left Viet Nam in 1975, and suffered the consequences of displacement. Mai and Dwayne are afflicted by the repercussion of having had to escape out of Viet Nam, of not having their parents with them, and of having to adapt to a new social and cultural system. Dwayne's ability to express, with Nina, the sorrow that he has been feeling since he was a child ends up in him deciding to communicate with his birth mother. Thanh surprises Dwayne by smoking and by showing him a photographic album of her Sino-Vietnamese family:

> Dwayne: *Ma, do you think you should be smoking?*
>
> Thanh: *Oh, indulge you poor mother. It's one of the few luxuries I can still enjoy. Here's your father, and this is your grandfather.*
>
> Dwayne: *You are all right, Ma?*
>
> Thanh: *Why wasn't Nina at the airport?*
>
> Dwayne: *She was held up at work.*
>
> Thanh: *Family is more important than work.*

The film director, like Thanh, Mai, and Dwayne, is Sino-Vietnamese. This dialogue is a reference to his cultural background. The characters, like the director are carriers of a hybrid

identity that penalizes some aspects of traditional Vietnamese culture. What Thanh considers as being a very offensive act, Dwayne views as normal in the context in which he lives. The tensions arising between Thanh (symbolizing traditional Vietnamese culture) and Dwayne (carrier of multiple identities) are representative of the frictions arising between the first generation of Vietnamese arriving in the United States and the younger generation of Vietnamese-Americans.

Thanh thinks American culture is not appropriate for Asian people. Much like the two black women at the Sunday service, the Vietnamese woman thinks Asian people should not mix with people coming from different cultures:

> Thanh: *How come you young people only date these Americans?*
>
> Samantha: *I don't know. It just happened.*
>
> Thanh: *It must be hard to find things in common.*
>
> Samantha: *We have a lot in common.*

She is also particularly worried about Dwayne marrying Nina. She thinks that a relationship with an African-American could destroy her son's life. The Vietnamese mother refuses to see that Dwayne is mostly American, rather than Vietnamese:

> Thanh: *I'm worried about Sap. His job, this girl... she's trouble. She can't give him what he needs. He doesn't seem happy.*
>
> Mai: *I know he loves Nina.*
>
> Thanh: *But he's not happy. Don't tell me. I know. I'm his mother. I don't know my children anymore. Why does he have to call that woman Mother? Why? You don't. It's my fault I know those people did the best they could, but they can't give him what his mother can. They're not blood.*
>
> (……)

Thanh: *I need to reach a friend of mine.*

Mai: *Why?*

Thanh: *Her daughter Lang would be perfect for Sap.*

The Vietnamese woman is determined to make her son live the life that Vietnamese diasporic people supposedly stereotypically live. She wants him to marry a woman with a Vietnamese cultural background, as Mai did with her husband Vinh. Thanh is not happy that Dwayne identifies Dolores as his mother. She thinks a mother should be tied by blood to her offspring. Chi Muoi Lo is commenting here on how ethnic cultural boundaries are monolithic in American society, but also on Vietnamese traditional perceptions of ethnicity and identity. People having certain somatic features should conform and behave in the way the individuals sharing these same physical characteristic do. If someone, like the Williams, break these rules people are, to say the very least, confused. Dwayne's physiognomy stops him from being seen as an Afro-America, despite culturally he deeply belongs to that culture. The return of the mother brings out, through Dwayne's character, the notion of both the fragility and arbitrariness of what identity is and how it should be embodied by its carrier. A parallel conflict of identity relates to the character of Samantha. Dwayne thinks the transvestite is a man; on the contrary Michael considers Samantha to be a woman. Michael does not perceive himself as homosexual. Michael asks his friend "*Who are you*?" The question about Dwayne's identity makes him very upset and he leaves.

The Afro-American-Vietnamese man is feeling very vulnerable about his identity, and tries to find a place where he can comfortably fit in. Having Thanh at home gradually makes Dwayne more aware of his Vietnamese cultural heritage, with the result that he becomes more alienated from the Williams and from Nina. Mai tells Nina that she should be more affectionate to her brother. The effect of Thanh on her son and daughter is to undermine the

life the two siblings have been having in the United States. Dwayne starts shopping in Little Saigon and keeps practicing his Vietnamese language even when outside the house. From having a standard American life, he suddenly buys and eats Vietnamese food. Dwayne's Vietnamese-Black American identity is made more Vietnamese by the simplified, but nonetheless significant, devices of making him consume Vietnamese food, learn the language and generally interact with the diasporic community.

Thanh's possessiveness towards Mai and Dwayne means Mai cannot go to Harold's birthday. The Vietnamese woman feels sick so Mai has to be home looking after her mother of birth. Mai feels so guilty about not going to her adoptive father's birthday dinner that she has a flashback of her, and her brother, in a refugee camp in the United States of America, where Harold adopted the two siblings. The Williams adopted them three days before the Government would have split them apart. The American officer in the camp is portrayed as being a compassionate human being. On the contrary the Vietnamese interpreter translating from English to Vietnamese, scares Mai and Dwayne by telling them very violent and distorted words:

> American Officer: *Listen! This isn't working. We have tried this...we have tried this. We haven't been able to move them. The time is up; the government is going to step-in in three days to split them up anyway.*
>
> Vietnamese Translator (translating what the Officer said, in Vietnamese in a very violent manner): *Nobody cares what you want! We're just trying to be nice. They're going to separate you anyway.*
>
> Mai (in Vietnamese): *I can't be separated from my brother.*
>
> American Officer: *Is everything ok?*
>
> Vietnamese Translator: *Yes, yes...It'll be very expensive*
>
> American Officer: *Expensive...*

Vietnamese Translator (in Vietnamese): *Don't be selfish! Think of your brother! Be happy you're in America!*

The film director shows Vietnamese people as being generally domineering and arrogant towards Mai and Dwayne. Both Thanh and the Vietnamese translator want to be in control of the siblings' life. Thanh is very condemnatory in terms of American culture and what it has brought to her offspring. However, the director acknowledges that, without America's generosity towards the Vietnamese refugees, the two siblings would not have had such a privileged upbringing.

The Vietnamese roots Mai has been looking for, cannot be found in her mother. The Afro-American-Vietnamese woman has been looking for an ideal mother that she cannot find even in the woman who gave birth to her. Thanh's judgmental and vociferous personality puts strain on the American life her children have. The Vietnamese woman deliberately wants to impose her will, in particular, upon Dwayne who clearly finds it difficult to juggle multiple-identities. He is expected to discontinue his cultural background to acquire a Vietnamese one he briefly knew during his early years of life. Dwayne stops listening to hip-hop to embrace Vietnamese opera. The director condemns the imposition of Vietnamese traditional culture upon individuals purely because of their Vietnamese ancestry when they have grown up in non-Vietnamese cultural environments. He infers that, primarily, culture is a product of environment.

Mai realizes that her "real" mother is Dolores, but her Vietnamese mother is, culturally, remote from her own. Mai understands that she will never be Vietnamese, and is a product of the culture she has been raised in. Mai identity's dilemma is solved when she recognizes she is American, and her parents are the ones that looked after her when she was a

child. Blood ties do not make parents more understanding of their offspring's needs. Chi Muoi Lo comments on the restrictive nature of classifying people purely based upon physical similarities. Looking Asian, he says, does not preclude individuals from having an American identity and feel completely disconnected with the culture which their physical bodies embody. Dwayne too realizes that he cannot live a Vietnamese traditional life. At the same time Thanh realizes that converting Dwayne into the son she wishes to have would make him very unhappy. Therefore she 'decides' to allow Dwayne to get on with his life, and to go and live with Mai, as initially planned. Peace arrives between the families when Mai and Dwayne accept their African-American-Vietnamese identities.

Catfish in Black Bean Sauce (1999) questions the rigid social categorisation by which a specific physiognomy is associated with a specific identity. The director is also saying that this form of labeling is found in *all* the environments to which his characters are linked. Mai and Dwayne do not conform to American social norms because they have black adoptive parents. Similarly, the Afro-American community is surprised by Harold and Dolores' choice in adopting two Asian children. The Vietnamese express their incredulity in seeing Sino-Vietnamese individuals being raised by a black American couple. Chi Muoi Lo comments, with heavy irony, on social constraints that are based upon physical expression of ethnicity.

This social tension is embedded in Dwayne and Mai. Mai is desperate to seek her birth mother. Dwayne's timid personality encloses the social pressures that he has incurred in his life. The two siblings have been traumatised by the displacing experience of leaving Viet Nam. Chi Muoi Lo indirectly suggests the American-Vietnamese conflict deeply affected Mai and Dwayne's lives. Their mother has endured hardship but her Vietnamese identity has not been compromised. The Vietnamese woman knows she is Vietnamese, and she is

anchored to her ethnic and physical identity. She did not have to experience the bodily and physical dislocation that her children had to deal with. For the director, identity is dependent upon the environment in which an individual is raised. Dislocation experiences, as endured by Vietnamese refugees have had a strong impact upon identity formation, particularly on the younger refugees who have spent most of their lives away from Viet Nam. This younger generation becomes the carrier of liminal, hybrid identity. Such liminal states are narrated by Chi Muoi Lo in his feature film.

Tony Bui

Tony Bui escaped from Viet Nam when he was two years old. His father was an officer in the Southern Vietnamese Air Force. Bui's family left their mother country just before the fall of Saigon (CNN: 2000). After having spent some time in to a refugee camp, Fort Chafee in Arkansas, his family settled in Sunnyvale, California, where his father opened a video rental business. Growing up in the United States made Tony Bui and his sibling Timothy Linh Bui reject Vietnamese culture, mocking every reference to their ancestral country and refusing to learn Vietnamese (Yabroff: 1999). When Tony Bui was nineteen years old in 1992, his mother sent him back to Viet Nam to visit, for the first time, his old grandparents.

When Tony Bui arrived to Viet Nam he was shocked by the humidity, and lack of commodities. After two weeks, Tony Bui went back to California. However, Viet Nam had evidently made an impact as he went back the following year:

> I ended up falling in love with the place and relearnt the language and spent the next six years there. And what I witnessed was a country that was not represented in American cinema or in the western one as a whole. I saw a humanity that's not in any of the films (Roddick: 1999).

After graduating from Loyola Marymount University, Tony Bui wrote, and later, directed his first feature film *Three Seasons* (1999).

Ba Mùa (Three Seasons) (1999)

Tony Bui's first film *Three Seasons* (1999) is about life in modern Viet Nam and takes place- and is shot in- in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. The story was written by Tony Bui and his brother Timothy Linh Bui. Significantly, the production is also the first post-Viet Nam war period American- produced film to be granted permission to be shot in Viet Nam itself. It was financed by Giai Phong Film Studio, October Films and Open City Films. With the exception of Harvey Keitel, who was also the film's executive producer, the actors are mainly Vietnamese or of Vietnamese ancestry. Keitel says: "I've thought about this for a while and came to a very simple conclusion: in the independent arena, more personal stories are permitted to be told, because the budgets are lower. And it's the personal stories that attract me; it's the personal story that is the ship that I sail on as I'm trying to understand a life." (Roddick: 1999).

The film is shot in a manner that pays attention to the smallest setting details and it depicts a highly exoticized Viet Nam. The intricate and delicate narrative and general style make it more palatable for an art-house audience. Film critic Ebert defines the film as a romantic film about Viet Nam: "It arrives billed as the first American fiction film shot entirely in postwar Vietnam; although Bui acknowledges his script had to win government approval, he was allowed to portray prostitution and poverty--perhaps because the city is seen not in a documentary way, but through the lens of fable. The result may not reflect the Vietnam of reality, but it's as close to life as most romantic melodramas, which is probably the point." (Ebert: 1999).

Tony Bui's film narrates four different interlocking stories. The first one concerns a woman named Kien An, who goes to work in Teacher Dao's lotus plantation to pick and, subsequently, sell them on streets. Another story is centered on a child street vendor called Woody, who comes across a Viet Nam veteran called James Hager, portrayed by Harvey Keitel. The boy mistakenly thinks that the American G.I, who is in Viet Nam looking for the daughter he had with a Vietnamese woman during the war, stole his suitcase. Finally, there is Hai, interpreted by the famous Vietnamese actor and Tony Bui's uncle Don Duong, who is a bicycle driver who falls in love with a Vietnamese prostitute called Lan.

The film is titled *Three Seasons* (1999) because each story is introduced by a particular season: the dry one, the rainy one and the growth season (Yabroff: 1999):

> Yabroff: What made you decide to use the three seasons as the framing device for the film?
> Tony Bui: The three major stories have the characteristics of different seasons. Hai and Lan, the cyclo driver and the prostitute, their story has the tones and textures of the dry season. The warm colors, the reds and yellows, represent the heat and passion. Woody, the street kid, is the wet season, with the night and rain and the grays and the blacks, and is about the isolation and coldness of his world. The last story, with Teacher Dao and Kien An, is the growth season, and that's about life, about poetry and flowers and song. Harvey's story, although it's talked alot about as a fourth story, is really a part of the other three (Yabroff: 1999).

The films open with Kien An getting out of a truck and knocking at Teacher Dao's lotus plantation. The master's estate is a traditional Vietnamese building, the master lives in a pagoda in the middle of the lotus pond. The viewers are informed by the strict and traditional manner in which Teacher Dao runs his place because the master's assistant, as soon as Kien An arrives, tells her: " *We follow strict roles here. It is important that none are violated. Teacher Dao is not a forgiving man.*" Furthermore, the traditional architecture and the

traditional lantern lighting the place, and the traditional clothes Mister Huy wears, signify the traditional Confucian norms existing in the lotus plantation. The audience is aware of the "traditional" and modest condition from which Kien An comes from because of her clothing, and the traditional conic straw hat she carries with her.

Tony Bui, in shooting the scenes in Teacher Dao's estate, gives a pastoral image of Viet Nam. The long shot, where Tony Bui, with an oneiric, purple-colored sky, frames the master's pagoda and lotus pond at dawn, with the background of a luscious Vietnamese forest, conveys a very romantic image of Viet Nam. This exotic image of Viet Nam is not far removed from the Orientalist image of Viet Nam. In American films, in contrast to French representations of Viet Nam, the form of imagery used by the director here, the making of Viet Nam into an exotic paradise, is unusual. In the former, the central motif of the Viet Nam war usually overrides everything: creating a 'luscious' Viet Nam is usually the last thing on their minds.

Tony Bui himself was unable to imagine Viet Nam at peace until he went to visit his family's ancestral country. The film director comments on how the stereotypical image of the Vietnamese war in American movies, and literature, made him think of Viet Nam as a country trapped between wars:

> Chat Moderator: How did the trip affect your filmmaking and outlook on life?
>
> Tony Bui: I lived I think what I would describe as a sheltered life. Growing up in the suburbs in Northern California closed my eyes from so much that was out in the world. My only knowledge of Vietnam was through the films that I had seen or the books that I had read. They all centered around war. So growing up, the word "Vietnam" to me was interchangeable with the word "war", and Vietnam was only a past tense for me. Then I went back to Vietnam in 1992 and that would change everything

> for me. In a sense, the walls that blinded me were lifted, and I began to see Vietnam in both its present tense and its future sense. I would begin to see a country not at war but at peace (CNN: 2000).

The perception Tony Bui had about his country, and his identity, shifted from an American-centered one to a more indigenous Vietnamese identity. Crystallizing Viet Nam in its past has been a major theme of how Western media have portrayed the country. The Western public saw either Viet Nam through the colonizer's point of view, or through the American war perspective. For the Western viewer, seeing contemporary Viet Nam in cinematic productions made by diasporic Vietnamese living in European and the United States of America represents a significant new way of consuming Viet Nam. The shots of the lotus pond and pagoda at dawn, with the Vietnamese women wearing their traditional dresses and straw conic hats are, of course, a very romanticized and nostalgic view of Viet Nam. It can be considered as scene evocative of the exotic Viet Nam imagined by its colonizers. However, at the same time the image challenges the American-Vietnamese war perspective the Americans are accustomed to watch in movies on Viet Nam, and this is where its significance lies. The American-Vietnamese dispora has been given the chance to represent their ancestral country, giving the American national narrative a shifting perspective on Viet Nam.

Tony Bui's use of the lotus flower is very evocative of his ancestral country, in both Western imagination and Vietnamese culture. The poetic figures linked with the lotus are numerous in Vietnamese literature. Ngoc (1998) demonstrates that in Vietnamese traditional folk song the lotus is symbolic for purity and nobility:

> In the pond amidst the field,
> nothing is as beautiful as lotus.
> Its leaves are green, and its white blossoms

> bear yellow stamens
>
> The stamens are yellow, the blooms white,
>
> and the leaves green.
>
> The blooms grow up from the mud,
>
> Yet, they bear no mud's stink (cited in Ngoc: 1998:138).

The lotus is also present in Buddhist iconography; the statues' bases are shaped as lotuses, the lotus flowers are offered to the Buddha and the ancestors' altar. Furthermore, Ngoc (1998) argues that many Vietnamese artistic works are named after the lotus: for instance, Tony Bui's unavailable short film *Yellow Lotus* (1995) made after his first visit to his ancestral country. The film director's return to Viet Nam has clearly influenced his cinematic work, and the way he perceives himself and the Vietnamese part of his hybrid identity. However, the nostalgia he felt for the exotic Viet Nam is still present in the American-Vietnamese filmmaker:

> We did a major search for this location for over a year all over Southern Vietnam. But all we found was the lake. Then we had to grow, like, 10,000 lotus bushes in it. So we spent three months before doing the scene - which only took a week to shoot - growing the lotuses.
>
> But we couldn't grow white lotuses in that mud, so we had to grow red ones and then, for weeks before, pick out all the red flowers and replace them with white plastic blossoms. The irony is that the film's about the contrast between purity of the real flowers and the fake plastic ones. But to get the idea across, we actually had to shoot fake plastic flowers (Film and F. Server: 1999).

The manner in which the film maker modified the Vietnamese environment to make it fit his idea of what a lotus pond looks like is interesting: it is symbolic of the idealized vision the film director has of Viet Nam. The symbolic purity carried by the white lotus made the film crew substitute the genuine red for the plastic white (Film and F. Server: 1999)

The picking activities are put to rhythm by the singing of the women. The timeless lotus plantation is diametrically opposed to the modern scenario of Ho Chi Minh City which Tony Bui still calls Saigon, as do all the diasporic Vietnamese film directors. Tony Bui does not, however, portray Ho Chi Minh City in the fragmented, chaotic, de-humanized, and capitalistic style in which Tran Anh Hung frames it in *Cyclo* (1995). In Bui's Southern Vietnamese capital, there are signs of modernization, globalization, and capitalism, for example the advertisements for *Coca-Cola*, *Maxwell*, and *Mobil*. However, the traffic is shot as being ordered and not chaotic, the extradiegetic traditional Vietnamese music of the scene conveys calm, tranquility, and fluidity of movement.

Hai is introduced in the film by shooting him while struggling to transport two Western tourists. The couple completely ignores the cyclo driver, Hai, and the physical effort he has to endure to transport the couple. The attention Tony Bui gives to these gestures is symbolic of the affinity the diasporic Vietnamese film director has with the film characters he represents in Three Seasons (1999):

> "I wanted to bring to the screen what I saw there," Bui explained me when we met in March to talk about his movie "and to give voice to the people that I met and become friends with and care about" (Blackwelder: 1999).

Woody is presented in the rainy season. The nickname Woody is given to the street vendor because of the Woody Woodpecker T-shirt he wears. It is ironic that a child that has a deprived childhood wears a T-shirt featuring an iconic American cartoon character. Blackwelder (1999) reports that Tony Bui wanted to nickname the boy Mickey Mouse, but Disney Corporation did not allow him to name the child after its world famous mouse. Woody sells chewing gums, cigarettes and other gadgets to the Western tourists.

While *Cyclo* (1995) presents Viet Nam as being pervaded by an individualistic way of living, Tony Bui frames Ho Chi Minh City as a city where generosity and altruism are still present. The purpose of this seems to be to offer a counter-narrative to that of American mainstream cinema where the Vietnamese, particularly in war situation, are generally presented as self-interested. Hai is portrayed as giving an old bicycle taxi driver some rubbing oil. However, Hai, compared to his working colleagues, is framed as being more reflexive and intellectual. When Hai is not cycling around Ho Chi Minh City, he spends his time reading an old book. From his stand post, Hai notices James Hager sitting outside a cheap hotel while smoking a cigarette and staring, at what once was a G.I bar.

Hai's humanity is shown in the way he helps people to escape, by offering them a ride, from an inconvenient situation. The cyclo driver promptly drives Lan away from two men screaming at her. The attraction Hai feels for the Vietnamese prostitute is symbolized by Hai waiting for her, outside the hotel, to finish her service; and by the red colored light Tony Bui uses to shot the scene. The use of red is a sign of the passion the cyclo driver feels for Lan, and the sex work through which Lan survives. Lan lives in District Two, once one of the poorest districts in the city. Despite being a well-paid prostitute, however, her identity still resides among the 'good' poor Vietnamese.

A sign of the non-traditional nature of the prostitute's personality is given by the fact that she smokes. Lan is framed as being a materialistic woman:

> *Tomorrow I will work at the Majestic. There are wealthier clients there. They know how to treat a woman. I'm tired of cheap bastards.*

As discussed above, Vietnamese women who smoke are often considered to be immoral. Furthermore, Lan also enjoys drinking. Of contrary nature is Hai, he reflects a gentle, spiritual, and caring part of Vietnamese society. The cyclo driver is a thoughtful individual who does not drink or smoke. That Hai refuses to introduce intoxicating substances into his body is symbolic of the bicycle taxi driver's pure spirit. The director here portrays a character whose 'goodness' can be associated with a Western notion of the caring and understanding male. Essentially, Hai is a hybrid and as such, indicative of the hybridity embedded in the director himself.

The viewer is then shown a close-up of a sugar cane shredding machine. In Viet Nam sugar cane juice is a popular drink that can be bought on street food stalls. Furthermore, Jang and Winn's documentary *Saigon USA* (2003) shows that in Little Saigon, this drink is also highly appreciated, and Vietnamese diasporic people come from as far as Canada to taste it. Drinking sugar cane juice is a way in which the Vietnamese diaspora can taste, incorporate, and have a synesthetic experience of their ancestral country. Consuming the juice helps the drinker reinforce and re-appropriate their Vietnamese identity. Tony Bui, by making Hai and his companion drinking the juice, states his belonging and knowledge about Viet Nam and its culture, and traditions.

The anxiety Tony Bui has toward a rapidly changing Viet Nam is illustrated in an interview with Charlie Rose (1999), where the film director reveals his sadness and melancholy over the loss of Saigon. The former capital of colonial Viet Nam, according to Tony Bui, is becoming more globalized, and is losing its traditions. The film director observes that nowadays young people are not interested in Vietnamese poetry anymore, they look for Western, and more precisely American products to consume. Traditional Vietnamese

identity is, for the director, being diluted by globalization, or perhaps better, by Americanisation. He is further commenting that the loss of Vietnamese traditions because of this process is-to give a specific, tangible example- making the bicycle taxi driver disappear: nowadays cyclo drivers cannot pick clients from hotels because all the parking space is occupied by taxis. Furthermore, there was a policy for which bicycle taxi drivers could not work in Ho Chi Minh City's main district. And worse was to come:

> ""The cyclo is part of our life and heritage," Thu says."We couldn't let it die."
> In 2001, as Vietnam strove to lure foreign investment and present a modern image to the world, the cyclo was banned as a remnant of the past (Vietnam Art Gallery: 2005).

The anxiety associated with Viet Nam's rapid socio-economic change is reflected throughout *Three Seasons* (1999). As the Cyclo driver speaking to Hai says, "*I'm waiting for the day that corner of ours is replaced by a hotel.*" Vietnamese culture was being eroded through two (related) processes: by the imposition of a capitalist system and by the Government's specific determination that the country be as 'modern' and 'Western' as possible. The cyclo driver, for both Tony Bui, and Tran Anh Hung in *Cyclo* (1995), are the entities through which the consequences of Vietnamese socio-economic transformations can most clearly be seen. The American-Vietnamese and French-Vietnamese film directors share the same idea of bicycle taxi drivers because they are one of the most recognizable features of Viet Nam. However, when they shot their films, the cyclo were on the verge of disappearing.

Tony Bui cinematographically translates the undermining of traditional Vietnamese customs by globalization by framing the two cyclo drivers, and a food stall selling watermelon and bananas, talking under a huge *Coca-Cola* advertisement covering an entire building's wall. The globalized Ho Chi Minh City is in stark contrast to Teacher Dao's estate.

At night in the latter we hear the extradiegetic sounds of crickets and of traditional Vietnamese music; people still walk in the dark holding straw lanterns. The traditional Viet Nam, contained in the confined space of the lotus plantation, gives the viewers synesthetic and nostalgic feelings. Tony Bui frames the procession bringing Kien An to Teacher Dao's house in such a highly aesthetic manner that each shot seems to have pictorial qualities.

The house where the old estate owner lives is a rich traditional Vietnamese one, with old style Vietnamese furniture and the ancestors' shrine. From Teacher Dao's home, the viewers are once more brought back to the harsh reality of Ho Chi Minh City's street life. Woody, under the pouring rain, at night, is trying to sell his goods to tourists outside the *Apocalypse Now* bar. Calling a bar in the former Saigon by such a name is, of course, evocative of the manner in which American people perceive Viet Nam. Tony Bui, by framing an American-Vietnamese entering that bar, and almost forgetting to pay the cyclo driver, condemns certain members of the Vietnamese diaspora and their arrogant attitude towards their ancestral country. Such individuals treat the Vietnamese in a patronizing fashion as the interview with Tony Bui shows below. Moreover, the film director questions what being Vietnamese entails:

> First, though, Tony Bui- who had grown up in Sunnyvale thinking of himself as Vietnamese, had to find out what it meant to actually be Vietnamese, not a 'Viet-Kieu'- a member of the millions-strong Vietnamese diaspora that has spread around the world since the wars began in the fifties.
>
> "Yeah," says Bui. "The whole dynamics of the Viet Kieu and Vietnam is quite interesting. There's something like 500.000 Viet Kieu that go through Vietnam every year. A lot come back, and the nationals like the Viet Kieu, because they come with their money. But they don't come with the right attitude. They come thinking somehow they're better than the Vietnamese in Vietnam. I touch upon that a little bit in Three Seasons" (Roddick: 1999).

The *Apocalypse Now* bar, as the name suggests, is the place, like Kurtz's domain in Francis Ford Coppola's film, where "Everyone here is lost in his world" in Hager's opinion. The character played by Harvey Keitel has come to Viet Nam to find his daughter and make peace with it and her. Keitel argues that Hager's journey is similar to his own one: he came to post-war Viet Nam to reconcile to the place the American Government was at war with for sixteen years.

> One cannot help but feel the resonance of the war and this wonderful achievement we've come to since the horrific war. It's a very hopeful sign to me, that we were brought here by a young Vietnamese boy, who immigrated to America when he was 2 or 3 years old, grew up in California's Silicon Valley, highly educated, then returns to his country of birth to write this beautiful story about people's aspirations (Fischer:1999).

Woody tries to forget temporarily also about his existence by trying some beer; however the young vendor is suddenly thrown back to reality when he realizes someone, he thinks Hager, has stolen his case.

The war was not, however, capable of perturbing the Teacher Dao estate, where old Vietnamese traditions are alive and observed with rigor. The sound of cicadas and crickets surrounding his house make the estate appear untouched by time. The poetic language in which Teacher Dao expresses his solitary and painful existence, and the poetries he composes until Hansen's disease spreads to his fingers, represent the way in which Tony Bui pays homage to the beauty of classical Vietnamese metrical composition. Kien An, by "lending" her finger to Teacher Dao, represents the new generation Vietnamese that will keep the poetic traditions alive.

The oneiric space where the lotus plantation owner is confined is in contrast to the vibrant Ho Chi Minh City, where Woody looks frantically for his case, and Hai waits outside the hotel Lan is working in for the night. The prostitute, with high ambitions, reveals her humane side when she gives Hai some Vietnamese pastries which she bought from a food street stall. However, she hides her benevolent personality by saying: "*Take it. I'm usually not so generous.*" It has been argued that Vietnamese people are constrained in the way they show their emotions toward someone: "in another instance, the sharing of a particular meal can offer the sentiment we each crave to hear: 'It's good to see you again-I've missed you'" (Ngueyen, Nguyen and Jensen: 2007: 13). Here, Tony Bui gives the audience an example of the importance of sharing food, symbolic of expressing shared emotions. The prostitute expresses her appreciation for Hai by handing him some food. Hai eats the food given by tasting it while watching the stars. For the cyclo driver, eating the bun given by Lan, is like tasting the lady he likes. As indicated by Crumpacker (2006: 47), food becomes an expression of love and sexuality; refusing to consume thereby is a symbol of rejection. Lan, by buying the bun, is intentionally showing the attraction she feels towards the cyclo driver. Hai, in turn, by eating the bun with such enjoyment, transfers Hai's persona into the bun and has the experience of being in very close contact with her by this means. By framing the prostitute and the cyclo driver while eating typical Vietnamese street food, Tony Bui remarks upon his status of being Vietnamese, and not an "ostentatious" Viet-Kieu. The food sold by street vendors is representative of Tony Bui's genuine experience of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese:

> [...] I never ate in a restaurant, I never stayed at the hotels, so my entire experience of Vietnam was on a very, very local level (Blackwelder: 1999).

Despite having experienced Viet Nam in its modern form, Tony Bui still romanticizes his place of birth. The journey the various characters endure is to find their identity, reconcile with themselves, and find love and contentment. Hai stops his solitude by becoming Lan's lover. The prostitute stops denying her traditional Vietnamese moral nature and chooses to live a poor, but fulfilling, life with Hai. The other characters are also portrayed, by the end of the film, as having found better lives: the American GI is reunited with Phuong; Woody and his little friend are not alone anymore but look after each other, and Kien-An finally makes the lotus plant master's dream to go back to his native place come true.

Woody wandering in and out of Ho Chi Minh City's alleys is filmed in a style typical of the Italian neo-realistic films such as De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952) and *The Bicycle Thief* (1949).[79] The camera following the vendor shows the meager reality of the parts of the city populated by the working classes, where Woody's master lives in one of the little and hidden backstreets. The neo-realist filmic style used by Tony Bui to film Hai while driving his cyclo through Ho Chi Minh City is comparable to the neo-realist style used by Tran Anh Hung while shooting the scenes where Cyclo pedals in to the city's congested traffic.

The thematic of globalization versus localism, and the deep divide between the new Vietnamese riches and the working classes, taking place in Ho Chi Minh City, is present in both *Three Seasons* (1999) and *Cyclo* (1995). Lan's monologue summarizes the frustrations and ambitions of the lower Vietnamese working classes:

> *It's a different world in there [referring to the Vietnamese the woman meets in hotels]. They are not like us. They have a different walk, a different talk. The sun rises for people like them. Not us. We live*

[79] Italian neo-realism was characterized by stories set among the lower orders, often featuring the poverty and desperation of the early post-World War II years and frequently using non-professional actors.

in their shadows, and it grows bigger with each new hotel built. Next time pay close attention to who comes through those front glass doors. How many do you see like yourself? One day I will remain in that world, even if I have to marry one to become one of them.

Lan's talk also reinforces the viewers' perspective on her materialistic personality. However, the audience feels entangled in a moral dilemma about Lan. Neither Tony Bui nor the viewer blames the prostitute for her job. The film director portrays the woman as someone that does not want to be condemned to live a life of hard work that leads just to poverty, as for her mother before her. Lan, in contrast to the older sister in *Cyclo* (1995), is aware of her precarious situation and the woman is not portrayed taking pleasure from it. On the contrary, the prostitute seems alienated by her profession. Tony Bui does not frame her in the voyeuristic style in which Tran Anh Hung made the spectators gaze upon the older sister. Lan does not wear provocative dresses and her look is polished and Western but erotic or vulgar. The director frames her as someone whose profession imposes upon her a certain look. However, Lan does not fit into the stereotypical image of a prostitute in Western films.

The alienation of modern Ho Chi Minh City is also felt by Lan. The introduction of the plastic lotus, symbolic of capitalist modernity, prevents her from selling any flower coming from Teacher Dao's plantation. Hai is the only one buying from Kien An; he does not want to be "*giving in to* [his] *convenience*". The bicycle taxi driver resists the politics of capitalism and savage Vietnamese modernization and buys fresh lotus flowers. This is symbolic of his resistance to the Americanized Viet Nam, and Hai's engagement with Vietnamese traditional values and life style. Tony Bui manifest his devotion towards Vietnamese traditional practices by making Hai reject the feigned life style introduced by the Western capitalistic logic which erodes historical Vietnamese cultural capital. The fleeting happiness Woody feels, while pretending to be a cowboy in an American western film,

reflects the manner in which the Vietnamese poor people escape the reality of their lived lives. However, the Vietnamese working classes are brought back to their indigent ways of life as soon as the illusionary world in which they are submerged, disappears.

During his nocturnal wanderings through Ho Chi Minh City, Woody meets another little girl who collects cans for a living. The owner of the restaurant where she goes to ask for empty cans throws her out, and the two children find shelter from the rain in a gallery that hosts an electronic shop in which televisions are broadcasting *Tom & Jerry* cartoons. Woody and the little girl taste a bit of childhood by watching the American cartoons. However, their illusion quickly vanishes once the cartoon finishes and the children go back to their daily street life. Tony Bui, by portraying the two children in such miserable conditions, makes the viewer synesthetically aware of the uncomfortable circumstances in which Woody and the little girl live. As Tony Bui argues setting the story during the rainy season nights gives the audience the idea of the negligence and isolation the two children receive from the surrounding environment (Blackwelder: 1999).

Time, in the muffled space of the lotus plantation, passes, articulated day by day, by the same rituals and activities, symbolic of the traditional Vietnam as imagined by the director. However, the prostitute's life is changed by the physical aggression she receives from one of her clients. Woody finally finds Hager to find out the American veteran is not the one that stole his case. The night Woody finds the American is the last night he is in Viet Nam and as Hager says, "*It's time to drink and forget this place.*" The former American soldier feels as lonely and isolated as the rest of the characters. He went back to Viet Nam to find his daughter but it seems Hager has not fulfilled his purpose. However, when the American veteran has lost all hope of finding his daughter, he finally meets her. Phuong is

entertaining a client during a meal organized in the hotel where Hager is staying. The American veteran's daughter works as an *entreneuse*, and is participating in a dinner with her client. Hager immediately recognizes his daughter and he is pervaded by mixed feelings of happiness about having found his daughter, and of frustration about discovering that she works, like the girl with Hager for the meal, as a prostitute.

Meal scenes are moments in which the family is united. The American father and his Amerasian daughter are, in fact, reunited during a meal. However, they both stop eating when they discover the other's identity. The way in which the two characters reject food, after they have acknowledge each other, is symptomatic of the deep state of shock James Hager and Phuong are in. Tony Bui in shooting the scene at the dining table amplifies the emotions the American veteran and his daughter feel in that particular moment. Vietnamese sentimental extradiegetic music contributes to emphasizing the pathos in the scene. Hager's own split identity heals when reunited with his daughter. The hybrid look of Phuong and her liminal identity links the former GI to Viet Nam and to the past with which he has tried to come to terms. The shots where Hager finds Phuong are very harsh on the viewers. The acting skills of Harvey Keitel make the scene so real that the viewer is stunned by the circumstances in which Keitel and Phuong find out about each other. Tony Bui skillfully makes the viewer aware of the world in which Vietnamese young women are trapped. The film maker does not portray the prostitutes in an eroticized way, but presents them with the compassionate eye of a human being who has actually experienced the disturbed existences of these women.

The isolation felt by Hager and Phuong ends when father and daughter meet for a drink and the American veteran tells his daughter about the relationship he had with her mother. The American veteran can now reconcile with Viet Nam and his daughter:

> James Hager: *I have made millions of mistakes in my life, most of which I will have to live with. When chances come around to make a wrong thing right it's a special thing. By meeting you today I hope to do one thing right.*

The old American veteran makes the right decision by meeting his daughter. Tony Bui makes the viewer aware that there is going to be a relationship between father and daughter, and that their meeting in Viet Nam is just the beginning of it. Tony Bui, through the story of James Hager, touches upon the issues connected with the Amerasian children left in Viet Nam after the American-Vietnamese conflict. Yarborough (2005) reports that Amerasian children were the poorest children during the Communist regime: Vietnamese people of mixed origins were victims of racism, classism (most of them were children of prostitutes and therefore ostracized by Vietnamese society) and because they were half-American, were politically discriminated against.

The diasporic Vietnamese film director touches upon the problem of poverty when Hai goes to visit Lan. Tony Bui shoots the scene in a neo-realistic style; indeed *Three Seasons* (2005) resembles more a documentary than a feature film in these shots. The reality in which the rundown streets are portrayed is poignant compared with the rest of the film. The shanty town of Ho Chi Minh City District Two is framed in its "true" nature. Tony Bui here tries to give the audience a flavor of real, contemporary Viet Nam and using neo-realist techniques helps in achieving this.

The viewer, like Hai, discovers Lan's "true" nature during the daily visit Hai pays her. The woman assesses her identity and finds herself excluded and isolated from Vietnamese society and love. Lan thinks that the life she has been leading cannot be redeemed. The

woman recognizes the breached Vietnamese values connected with femininity and now she has to endure a life of isolation:

> Lan: *Open your eyes Hai. Can't you see who stands before you? I am a whore and you were my cyclo driver. That's all. Nothing more. Please, don't make me feel what I'm not capable of.*

However, Hai is not scandalized by her past: the bicycle taxi driver is only interested in Lan, in her "real" nature:

> Lan: *Have you forgotten that I've been with many men?*
>
> Hai: *Not with you the way I have.*

The ideas of hope and redemption are central themes in Tony Bui's *Three Seasons* (1999). These ideas are related to the notion of the American Dream as understood by Vietnamese-Americans. Indeed, the positive attitude which pervades the film seems, more specifically, to be a product of the director's own American identity. The characters having the purity to save whoever they meet, like the purity contained in the lotus flowers, are Hai and Kien An. The *cao gio* massage Hai gives Lan, filmed in close-up, provide the only sensual imagery of the whole film. Lan reveals her love for Hai by holding his hand and not letting him go away. Small gestures, in contrast to extreme emotions, are part of the Vietnamese cultural heritage. Tony Bui, by framing minute actions, creates important meaning in *Three Seasons* (1999). The film director, using this method of communication, translates the Vietnamese delicate approach to emotions into cinematographic language.

The imminent death of Teacher Dao is symbolized by the dry lotus' blossom standing in the middle of a fresh bunch of flowers:

> Teacher Dao [speaking to Kien An]: *Do you know why I made you sing the first night you were here? The song you sang in the lake that afternoon had crossed my ears before. It was the song of the women of the floating market of my childhood. I had forgotten my youth, the only time I was pure and whole, until I heard your song.*

Teacher Dao heals from his conflictual life by discovering the part of his life he forgot, his youth. Kien An represents the healing medium that redeems Teacher Dao's impurity, makes him "pure and whole" as he was in his early years of existence. The process of healing split identities, as argued by Naficy (2001), is part of the diasporic film experience. Tony Bui projects his anxieties he feels about having hidden his Vietnamese roots and therefore denying himself the experience of being whole, into his film characters:

> Interviewer: Isn't the lack of familiarity with our past and history a repeating theme you have seen in many kids growing up in this country [the United States of America] from various backgrounds?
>
> Tony Bui: I think so. What I've found through the years is that a lot of children than come from other backgrounds tend to suppress that or deny it so they can fit in, so they can assimilate and, more importantly, not feel different. But, inevitably, as you get older- especially after high school- questions arise that draw you back to where you come from, to answer questions that you didn't want to ask the years prior.
>
> Interviewer: I had a similar eye-opening experience when I returned home. It made me realize that I am indeed Vietnamese and, at the same time, very American. It's such an interesting paradox.
>
> Tony Bui: For me, it's not longer a paradox or something I question or confuses me like when I was a child. The dichotomy is something I embrace now, being both of American culture and Vietnamese culture. And I feel now that as I get older, it strengthens me. It gives me more perspective on how I see things, which helps how I live and how I work (CNN: 2000).

As Tony Bui finds peace in accepting his American-Vietnamese identity, so the characters in *Three Seasons* (1999) rediscover their wholeness in accepting, and not denying parts of their identities.

The little girl street vendor externalizes her friendship with Woody by sharing the bun she is eating. Sharing food has, since the dawn of humanity, been associated with the creation of cooperation and connections between individuals (Jones: 2007: 54). Dividing the scant food the poor child has with her little fellow is a sign of real generosity and caring. Interaction with food, that can often been neglected in film analysis, is the carrier of deep symbolic meanings. Tony Bui could not have chosen any better medium to convey such a big act of love and magnanimity. Woody becomes "completed" when he finds his case, and hand in hand goes away with his newly acquired companion. Food sharing is strongly symbolic of their love for one another.

Kien An, after Teacher Dao's death, is left with the poetry he composed through his life. Kien An realises Teacher Dao's dream of going back to the floating market and spreading white lotus flowers on the water. Similarly, Hai brings Lan to the street leading to her old school, during the flowers' seasons, as she dreamed of doing. The woman is wearing a white *ao dai* without having put on any make-up, symbolic of her newly found purity. The final shots are filmed in a sepia color; the viewers are presented with dream like images. The sense of isolation felt by the characters is blown away in these closing images, which are accompanied by a choir of female Vietnamese voices singing the song Kien An sang for Teacher Dao.

Three Seasons (1999) is a film that has the optimism that perhaps only an America-Vietnamese film director can express. In *Three Seasons* (1999), the juxtaposition of Vietnamese old traditions and the American ethos is obvious:

> What mother's altar and the shelves carrying their various knickknacks underneath seek to tell is the typical Vietnamese American transition, one where Old World fatalism finally meets the New World Optimism, the American Dream. [...] Oftentimes to be Vietnamese American, one lurks between these two opposite ideas, negotiating, that is, between night and day" (Lam: 2009: 170).

The positive ending of Tony Bui's film is inspired by his hybrid narrative, which allows the director to have such an optimistic approach to people's destinies.

Timothy Linh Bui

Timothy Linh Bui is the brother of the film director and screen writer Tony Bui, growing up with his sibling. He studied cinema at the University of Southern California's Columbia Film School (Chaw: 2002). Before making *Green Dragon* (2001), he co-wrote and produced *Three Seasons* (1999). *Green Dragon* (2001) is the first feature film to be directed by Timothy Linh Bui.

Green Dragon (2001)

Green Dragon is a film written and directed by the American-Vietnamese filmmaker Timothy Linh Bui. The film was produced by Franchise Classics, Franchise Pictures, Rickshaw Films, Spirit Dance Entertainment and TGD Productions. It is set in Camp Pendleton, a former Vietnamese refugee camp in California. The cast mainly consists of actors- some non-professional- of Vietnamese ancestry. However, two acclaimed American actors also feature: Patrick Swayze and Forest Whitaker. Chaw (2002) states that Bui was reluctant in having Swayze acting in Green Dragon (2001). However, the film director apparently changed his mind the moment he actually spoke with Swayze.

Certainly the two famous American actors and the over-sentimental script make the film more palatable for the general public. Film critic Kehr (2002) defines the film as "not a pernicious film, but simply one that tugs too tenaciously at the heartstrings." However, film critics were impressed by the performances of Swayze and Whitaker. Rooney (2001) argues that "Swayze and Whitaker are effective without especially stretching their acting range,

while Duong, who co-starred with Harvey Keitel in "Three Seasons," brings solemn understatement and warmth that serve his role well."

The film narrates the story of Minh and Anh, two Vietnamese children, who, with their uncle Tai Tran, left Viet Nam in 1975 before the fall of Saigon. Their mother is thought to have been lost in the rush to leave Viet Nam. The film is set in a Vietnamese refugee camp at Camp Pendleton Marine Base in California. In spite of the dislocation the Vietnamese people had to face in their journey to find a new home, the film describes how the Vietnamese people are able to adjust to unfamiliar circumstances and begin to make the United States their own country.

Minh socializes with Addies, a black voluntary cook who has also experienced the solitary life, enduring strong prejudice similar to that which the Vietnamese are facing in the United States. Tai, the uncle, by introducing himself to Gunnery Sergeant Jim Lance, is able to become an official camp interpreter. Through his character the audience can see what happens to the Vietnamese in a refugee camp. *Green Dragon* (2001) is shot entirely within Camp Pendleton to emphasize the continual displacement and homelessness Vietnamese-American refugees had to endure both before and after their arrival in the United States. As argued by Naficy (2001) plots where homelessness and dislocation are central elements to the film narrative, are typical of diasporic film directors. Minh and Anh's life start to be stabilized when Tai Tran marries Thuy Hoa, a Southern Vietnamese General's daughter. The married couple, together with Tai's niece, nephew, brother and Hoa's sister, leaves Camp Pendleton.

Green Dragon (2001) is an autobiographical film. Timothy Linh Bui's family was torn apart when his mother left Viet Nam, and they resettled in Fort Chafee: the film director's mother left her brother, Don Duong, in Viet Nam[80]. Timothy Linh Bui's uncle, as mentioned above, is now a famous Vietnamese actor and, in this film, portrays the character of Tai. The film begins with documentary footage of the Vietnamese-American war. The film director, for his first shot, chooses to show a familiar image of B-52s dropping bombs onto Vietnamese soil. This image cuts to Vietnamese soldiers bringing away one of their dead companions, and then to Vietnamese civilians trying to get through to the American Embassy to get out of their home country. Some manage to escape by helicopter, while the majority is not able to make it outside Viet Nam. Timothy Linh Bui presents the exodus and dislocation the Vietnamese-including his own family- experienced after the fall of Saigon. The contextual footage is accompanied by extradiegetic Vietnamese traditional music. Moreover, the film director, in showing archive footage, informs the spectator of the veracity of *Green Dragon*'s (2001) narrative structure and content.

From the images of home-seeking and displacement, the film then shifts to framing the US Army while building Camp Pendleton. The Vietnamese music is now mixed with a Western sad music theme. This musical fusion is symbolic of the hybrid experience, of living among a displaced community in the United States: the Vietnamese exiled experience when they left their home country. Indeed, this was the experience of the film director, his brother and mother, when they left Viet Nam, in 1975, and were relocated to Fort Chafee refugee camp in Arkansas:

[80] Don Duong after shooting *Green Dragon* (2001) and *We Were Soldiers* (2002) went back to Viet Nam. While there, he was arrested, by the Vietnamese Government due to his role in the two films, being considered to be' a traitor' to Viet Nam (Busch:2002).

> [...] After Three Seasons, my brother and I said that before we move on to make any other film, we felt that this film, Green Dragon, was an important story to tell, because it was the journey our family took to come to this country. As a kid we would hear many stories of our parents, and especially my mother, telling of her first few days and weeks in America- especially how she feared the moonlight because it brought her a lot of pain and sorrow. And as kids, we didn't really understand what she meant. It became important to understand what she meant, to be sat down and talked to us a big inspiration for the film (Russell: 2002).

In making *Green Dragon* (2001), the director is rethinking his past, and expressing his desire to understand the history and narrative of the first wave of exiled Vietnamese, framed around their journey to find a new home, their search for identity and cultural affirmation, outside their home country. Timothy Linh Bui shows, for example, the traumatic experiences the Vietnamese endured during the war, by making Minh suddenly wake up in the middle of the night after he has had a bad dream which has revived his memories of war. The viewer knows that Minh's nightmare is about the war because of the extradiegetic sound of an exploding bomb.

The Vietnamese characters are photographed sleeping on the floor, in an overcrowded room with no beds. The sounds of the room's fan and its shadow reflected on the floor and people, evokes the sounds of helicopters and their revolving blades are reminders of their presence. The film director, by using sounds that recall the war, is stating that the Vietnamese who arrived in the United States were still affected by their experiences, and they could vividly sense it even in their sleep. The Vietnamese synesthetically experience the American-Vietnamese conflict even after they have departed from the war's site. Furthermore, as narrated, for example, by Andrew Lam (2005), the Vietnam-American conflict is still intensely remembered and commemorated by the first generation of Vietnamese-Americans.

People like Andrew Lam's father constructed and reinforced their Vietnamese identity by opposing their Vietnamese cultural heritage to the one preached by the Vietnamese Communists in Viet Nam. The tensions between Southern and Northern Vietnamese were, to some degree, continued in exile. The following short extract entertainingly makes a serious point about conflictual identities continuing in the diaspora:

> "The Northerners immolate themselves and talk too readily of martyrdom. They don't think rationally, they think emotionally. Tu sais comme ta mere! These boys... most have ingested all the plots for tragedy from their Northern Catholic parents."
>
> My mother dropped her chopsticks and feigned anger. "We Northerners defeated the French while you drank their wine", she said. But we all laughed (Lam: 2005: 64)

Timothy Linh Bui, using both a medium shot and close-ups, films Vietnamese women and men making their way to the structures that will host them. The director frames the dislocating experience of the Vietnamese exiled people by showing them carrying their meager belongings, and adjusting to the barracks the American Army have built to house them in the refugees' camp. The viewer by seeing the Vietnamese exiles carrying their belongings can see and sense the diasporic journey the Vietnamese exiled people had to embrace after having left their mother country.

The director frames the refugee camp as a tranquil and serene place. The director portrays Sergeant Lance as a welcoming individual that organizes and looks after the Vietnamese. The Americans represented a hostile force, but as individuals, were often helpful and kind. Timothy Linh Bui, by portraying the American in such a benevolent manner, reinforces his American's identity side and pay homage to the ones that offered him and his family the chance to start a new life in what became the Bui brothers' home country.

Through the exploring eyes of Minh, Timothy Linh Bui make the viewer aware of the daily difficulties the Vietnamese faced in adapting to a new environment. A Vietnamese woman complains that "*the milk here is too bitter. She* [her baby daughter] *won't drink it.*" However, her husband immediately finds a solution to the problem: "*I will ask for some sugar*". The film director gives the audience positive and amicable sensations about Camp Pendleton. People are framed while looking for relatives on Pendleton's camp board, where the pictures of family and friends are placed in order that they can be tracked in their exilic journeys. However, the director gives the audience a sense of displacement by showing the spectators photos of people the Vietnamese refugees in Camp Pendleton do not know the destiny of. The photographs shown by Timothy Linh Bui are symbolic of the myriad of stories each picture is linked with:

> Interviewer: A bulletin board of photographs is a central image in your film- it serves as a metaphoric signpost?
>
> Bui: Correct -and the last shot of the film is a photograph, too- that archive was so evocative for me and the film emotionally. From there I met with refugees who went through the camps- friends of friends of friends, this long chain of stories, and from all the stories we discerned certain universal themes and distilled Green Dragon's stories from them (Chaw:2002).

The pictures on the board do not only serve the purpose of conveying to the audience the sensorial displacement of the Vietnamese experience. They are also there to help the director:

> I got as much I could from my mother, then went to Camp Pendleton and looked through their photographic archives. Thousands and thousands of photographs and for each of them I could imagine a scene or a scenario and a few of those evolved into the screenplay (Chaw: 2002).

The viewer is persuaded into thinking *Green Dragon* (2001) is a film based on the truthful experiences shared by the first generation of Vietnamese exiled in the United States. To further intensify the veracity of the film, the director uses, as extradiegetic sound, the daily radio reports from *Voice of America* during the war. The historical context in which *Green Dragon* (2001) is set is clearly specified by the film director. Timothy Linh Bui, through the voice of the Voice of America radio speaker give the spectators the idea of the desperate situations the Southern Vietnamese were in during the end of the American-Vietnamese conflict:

> While the shops and restaurants might open in Saigon, as usual, many civilians are planning their escape or just stirring their coffee and endlessly wait. The fortunate few with US dollars in connection with the Americans have been purchasing seats for as much as eight-thousand USA dollars. For the others, prayer is the only hope.

Timothy Linh Bui keeps comparing the situation in Camp Pendleton to the one in Viet Nam. The film director makes the viewer aware of the relatively lucky circumstances in which the Camp Pendleton refugees found themselves. The film director shows how the Americans looked after the Vietnamese in the camp. The daily menu was written in both Vietnamese and American and it comprised traditional elements such as rice, and the beloved chicken that, as Tai explains to Sergeant Lance, in Viet Nam it is eaten for special occasions. The American Army tries to create meals for the exiled Vietnamese to make them feel more as if they are at home.

In the camp, the director frames Tai while nailing a cross on a wall. Tai, like Hoa, is a Southern Vietnamese Christian. For Western viewers, seeing a Vietnamese worshipping Christ is an unusual sight. Westerners tend to think of Vietnamese people as Buddhist; this

perception is reflected and reinforced by most film imagery. Timothy Linh Bui, however, frames Tai and Hoa as Christians in order to make them easily recognizable as Southern Vietnamese coming from a privileged background, and also to convey something of the religious/social heterogeneity of the country to the Western audience. Hoa's father is a Southern Vietnamese General, and Tai used to work for the Americans in Viet Nam, as a translator. The Thuy family and Tai are both English speakers. As Bryan (1997) argues, the majority of Vietnamese refugees that entered in to the United States up until 1980, as Hoa and Tai did, were able to escape from their home country because of their connections with the American Government. The first wave of Vietnamese refugees came from middle to upper class background; they were people from Viet Nam's urban areas and predominantly Catholics. Timothy Linh Bui uses such characteristics to mark class differentiations in *Green Dragon* (2001). For the director, it is essential to educate the viewer about the different Vietnamese religious beliefs and identities to show to those unfamiliar with the country that it is difficult, indeed unwise, to make generalizations.

Camp Pendleton at night is rhythmically invested with the sound of a Vietnamese Buddhist bell -*mo gia tri*- that General Thuy uses to accompany his prayers. In spite of being in a foreign land, the Vietnamese still perform the rituals that are part of the traditional Vietnamese identity. This extends even, for instance, to a Vietnamese man having bought with him his second wife. Indeed, others such as General Thuy, having abandoned his native country in order to please his older daughter, actually start impregnating the American soil with Vietnamese identity. He plants some seeds of red chilli, a traditional culinary Vietnamese ingredient that he waters daily. While the Vietnamese start adapting to their new life in Camp Pendleton, Timothy Linh Bui frames the American as having remorse about the American Vietnamese war:

> Sergeant Lance to Tai: *You realize that we put this place up in less than forty-eight hours. And by the time the last portable hall it is installed we are going to be able to house fifteen-thousand people. And the thing I can't understand is how can we do all this and mess up so badly over there...*

Timothy Linh Bui follows the main American narrative about the American-Vietnamese conflict here: the Americans are imagined both as feeling guilt, and as being the major player in the American-Vietnamese conflict. This is the most common approach in American-Vietnamese cinema, taken by film directors like the Bui brothers, Victor Vu, and Chi Muoi Lo. However, Ham Tran is exceptional in insisting on showing the audience that the Northern and Southern Vietnamese people were also major protagonists in the war.

While Walt Disney did allow the image of Mickey Mouse, to be used in *Three Seasons* (1999), Timothy Linh Bui in his first feature film uses a surrogate of Disney's character: Mighty Mouse. It is over this American symbol that Addie introduces himself to Minh. The black chef, to entertain the solitary Vietnamese child, draws a picture of the young Vietnamese boy in the body of the comic strip character. The diasporic Vietnamese film director seems to comment that Mickey Mouse is far too *haut monde* for the poor refugee Vietnamese children just arrived in the United States. It is worth noticing, like in *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999), how the diasporic Vietnamese film director associates the Vietnamese relocation experiences to the vicissitudes suffered by the black American people.

However, such pain, according to Timothy Linh Bui, brings the Vietnamese the charisma and positive attitude that helps them to create comfortable lives. The Vietnamese-American film director pays homage to Duc, a Vietnamese refugee, and his ability to imagine a bright future for the Vietnamese community:

Duc: *Hey, I tell you what, I've got a big dream in this country.*

Vietnamese man: *Me too. I'm going to own a Cadillac.*

Vietnamese man: *You know what I heard? That in America the lowest they can pay you is two dollars and ten cents an hour.*

Tai: *But what kind of degree would you need?*

Vietnamese man: *None. Anyone can wash windows.*

Quang Hai: *I don't believe you.*

Vietnamese man: *It's the truth. A man in our tent told us so. He has a nephew who came here to study, and he washes windows in the summer.*

Duc: *It doesn't matter. My dream is going to be bigger than washing windows.*

Tai: *And what dreams are those?*

Duc: *I'm not sure. But you guys see this mole? It has to bring me fortune sooner or later. It has not brought me love. Maybe I could start something called Little Saigon. Imagine a little community with shops and restaurants. A home away from home.*

Tai: *It sounds a bit expensive. Such big plans!*

Vietnamese man: *How do you know we can even make it out of here?*

Duc: *What do we have to lose? We lost everything already.*

Vietnamese man: *Duc's right.*

Vietnamese man: *I'll be happy washing windows.*

Tai: *Little Saigon needs Vietnamese people out there. I'm not sure we'll ever see each other again. They are spreading us across America.*

The Vietnamese refugee camp in America acted as a kind of limbo in which the Vietnamese exiles could create a liminal Vietnamese society without getting in touch with the American one. The American world outside the camp, that the Vietnamese in the refugee camps had not yet experienced, was thought to be a non-familiar, and therefore scary one:

> A lot of the Vietnamese had a lot of fear, because as long as they were around Camp Pendleton they were around familiar faces. To them, they believed they had one foot in America, but also one still in

> Vietnam as this bridge. Once they left, they may never see their friends or families again because at that time people were being separated, large families were being torn apart to different sponsors in different states (Russell: 2002).

The Vietnamese in America went from one displacement experience to another. Firstly, they left their home country, and secondly, arriving in America, were scattered all over the country. Timothy Linh Bui shows the Vietnamese as scared to step outside the refugee camp. They were fearful of losing their community and finding themselves isolated and alienated in a new country with such different cultural traditions. Such dramatic experiences have, inevitably, had a strong impact on the Vietnamese-American community. Their exilic identity and narrative reflects the shared experiences of the first wave arriving in the United States. *Green Dragon* (2001) pays tribute to this first generation of Vietnamese-Americans who, in due course, settled in the United States, but who managed to hold onto their Vietnamese identity. Moreover, Timothy Linh Bui, by portraying the American soldiers in such a benevolent mode, pays his respect to the Americans who gave the chance to the Vietnamese-American people to build their new lives, homes and communities. Sergeant Lance is always accommodating to the Vietnamese refugees in every possible manner. Moreover, to further emphasize this point about the Americans, the director also has Sergeant Lance learning Vietnamese language.

Furthermore, the American Sergeant is so concerned about making the Vietnamese exiles feel at home that he is concerned about the Vietnamese people not eating the fish he commanded the chefs to prepare. The affection the American feels for the Vietnamese refugees is expressed by such small, but highly symbolic, gestures. Again, food conveys meaning that would otherwise be difficult to express.

> Sergeant Lance: *I thought the Vietnamese liked fish.*
>
> Tai: *Your fish cut is fatter. Too much fatty meat for us. We like chicken. In Vietnam chicken is expensive.*
>
> Sergeant Lance (in Vietnamese): *In America, fish is expensive.*

However, despite the Americans' efforts to make the Vietnamese feel at ease in their new country, the Vietnamese had problems adapting to the United States due to the new social/cultural environment.

Although the Vietnamese exiles did find the strength to start a new life in a foreign country with a complete different culture, some of them, unsurprisingly, suffered from the familial fragmentation that their exilic journeys caused:

> Vietnamese man after Duc asks him to switch off the radio broadcasting news about the American-Vietnamese conflict: *What's depressing is that we could share the same fate, Tai. Why did the Americans have to abandon us? [...] What do you know? Did you ever fight in the war? Do you still have loved ones left behind in Vietnam? Do you ever feel guilty for being here? [...] Tai, what if I want to go back? My mother, my father, brothers and sisters are still left in Vietnam.*

The Vietnamese have mixed feelings about having escaped their country and left their families during such a turbulent period of Vietnamese history. Some other Vietnamese, whose close family is safe in the United States, express their desire of wanting to go back to their home country to be buried next their loved ones:

> Hoa: *We weren't sure if we would get out. But every night I would pray to the Virgin. Now that she answered my prayers, my father just wants to return and be buried next to my mother.*

The film director shows how the first wave Vietnamese has been torn apart by the different feelings they felt about their offspring's future, and the prospect of starting a new and better life in the United States, and the future of the beloved ones they left in their mother country. The feelings of guilt and remorse felt by the first Vietnamese-Americans is not a narrative used solely in diasporic Vietnamese cinema. Vietnamese-Americans journalists and writers such as Andrew Lam have also articulated the same experiences:

> So far from home, Mother nevertheless took her reference points in autumn, her favorite season. Autumn, the dark season, came in the form of letters she received from relatives and friends left behind. Brown flimsy thin like dead leaves, recycled who knows how many times, the letters threatened to dissolve with a single tear. They unanimously told of tragic lives: Aunty and her family barely survived; Cousin is caught for the umpteenth time trying to escape; Uncle has died from heart failure while being interrogated by the Viet Kong; yet another Uncle is indefinitely incarcerated in a malaria-infested reeducation camp; and no news yet of the Cousin and family who disappeared in the South China Sea. [...] Then, as if to anchor me in the Old World tragedy, as if to bind me to that shared narrative of loss and misery, mother insisted that I, too, read those letters" (Lam: 2005: 5).

As is apparent in Lam's work, the Vietnamese-American shared identity has been shaped by narratives of loss and poverty that the Vietnamese living in the United States heard about their relatives living in Viet Nam. The hatred the first generation of Vietnamese-American nourished for the Vietnamese Communist Government had been fomented by their forced escapes and by the stories they received from the relatives who could not make it out of Viet Nam. The abhorrence many Americans felt for Vietnamese Communists was shared by the majority of the first generation of Vietnamese-Americans. The Vietnamese Communist Government, according to *Green Dragon* (2001), was the enemy that both the Americans and Southern Vietnamese wanted to annihilate.

Timothy Linh Bui presents the viewers with some insight about Vietnamese traditional culture. When Sergeant Lance takes a picture of Tai and his niece and nephew, Tai says: "*Oh, no! You shouldn't have done that. It's bad luck being three in pictures*!" Minh and Addie communicate by drawing, and they both share the same motherless life. Timothy Linh Bui makes the viewer aware that family fragmentation and suffering is not the exclusive preserve of the Vietnamese; the black Americans have been subject to such conditions earlier in history than the Vietnamese refugees. Addie did not have any family, his mother died and his father abandoned him when he was four years old. He uses art as a therapy that will allow him to re-construct and accept his past. As for the director, the process of creating images contains healing properties. The sorrow and dislocation felt by Minh is made more bearable by the amicability offered by the black-American voluntary chef:

> Addie: *What I am supposed to call you? I don't think that kid of friend is actually that appropriate. I'm Addie. And you?*

The Vietnamese diasporic film directors, like Addie, express the conflictual feelings they hold-in their case about Viet Nam and its diaspora- through a type of therapy: in their case, the use of moving images. The art therapy used by Addie to re-inscribe his past has the curative properties that the Vietnamese diasporic film directors express when they cinematographically reconstruct Viet Nam, its cultural traditions, its history, and its people.

While Addie, in his drawings, portrays his orphan condition, and the suffering that he had to endure, Minh paints his home, Viet Nam in red, as a symbol of the bloodshed in his mother country, the corpses and the airplanes dropping bombs on Vietnamese people and their houses. However, despite Addie and Minh being from different cultural backgrounds,

the shared lack of mother and displacement are not the only things common to them. Addie, on the mural he and Minh are painting, draws a green dragon:

> *When I was younger I always dreamt of a green dragon coming to take me to find my father. Maybe this dragon will help you find your mother.*

The dragon *Lord of the Lac* is, in Vietnamese mythology, the animal that is the father of all the Vietnamese people (Jamieson: 1993). Furthermore, to both the Vietnamese and those unfamiliar with their traditional culture, the dragon is considered to be the most important and recognized animal of Vietnamese mythology. It symbolizes nobility and power; it is believed to be immortal and can live anywhere (US Department of Navy: 1967). The director links the magical powers of the dragon to the adaptability of the Vietnamese diaspora, and their perpetuation of Vietnamese traditional culture and identity.

The American-Vietnamese film director makes the viewer aware of the guilt the American suffered in working with the Vietnamese. Sergeant Lance is haunted by the Vietnamese people's desperation, and captures photos of their exilic status and their daily life at Camp Pendleton. The extradigetic music style at this point takes the form of a lament that emphasizes the interior pain experienced by Sergeant Lance. The red light of the dark room gives the shots spectral and macabre connotations. It seems that Sergeant Lance is covered in blood streaming off the pictures of the Vietnamese people he photographed. Sergeant Lance is, for the director, symbolic of the culpability the American people felt about the American-Vietnamese conflict. At the same time, Timothy Linh Bui makes the viewer aware of the American narrative on the American-Vietnamese war where they see themselves as the main protagonists of the American-Vietnamese dispute.

Timothy Linh Bui portrays the Vietnamese refugees as accusing those among them feeling who feel home sick and wish to go back to Viet Nam of being traitors and Communist supporters. The Vietnamese exiled people are highly vigilant in their camps about spotting any trace of Communist credo:

> Sergeant Lance: *It seems one of the refugees was accused of being a Communist when he told people he wanted to be repatriated.*
>
> Tai: *What is his name?*
>
> Sergeant Lance: *Quang Hai.*
>
> Tai: *Quang Hai.*
>
> Sergeant Lance: *Actually, we found out later he never wanted to come here in the first place and just got caught up in the confusion. So what we have done is to set up a designated area for any others like him. On pending approval they will be shipped back. He has got a war injury on his right hand.*

The film director also shows the audience the political tension between the Vietnamese:

> Duc screaming at General Thuy: *Big brother. I'm talking to you. Why must you lie to us? We kept fighting just like you ordered us to. While back in the city, people were fleeing. You promised you would be with us till the end. To fight for victory! You are a coward for being here before all of us. Your brothers died fighting for freedom! You are a coward! And a disgrace to the country.*

Duc cannot conceive how a general supposed to lead its country to victory could desert his post while telling people to fight for their country's freedom. However, Timothy Linh Bui offers the viewer the counter narrative that motivated General Thuy to leave the country for which he had been fighting. For the director, it is vital to show the diversity of attitudes and emotions among the individuals who left Viet Nam.

General Thuy talking to Tai: *Why must you salute me? When you shamed away at seeing my face?*

Tai: *You are still a General, sir.*

General Thuy: *Of what nation? Back then I was a twenty-years-old idealist. I joined the Anti-French Resistance. But when the leadership declared themselves the Indochinese Communist Party, I defected to the "Nationalists". All my life I have been committed to the goal of bringing freedom and democracy to the Vietnamese people. Alas, at the ending I have nothing but the feeling of being betrayed twice.*

Tai: *Do you believe America betrayed us?*

General Thuy: *That is not longer of importance. The result is the same. [...] Tonight I feel as useless as an uprooted old tree that cannot be replanted.*[81]

Green Dragon (2001) has been defined as an apolitical film (Chaw: 2002). However, Timothy Linh Bui, rather than being apolitical, wants to represent and make the viewer appreciate the complex sentiments of the exiled Vietnamese regarding the Vietnamese Communist defeat of the Southern Vietnamese Army. The film director explains that certain people felt glad the South was defeated because they could get away to America; others, like Timothy Linh Bui's mother felt betrayed by America. Some Vietnamese could not comprehend how the United States, after investing so much in the American-Vietnamese conflict, could simply decide to leave Viet Nam and declare they were defeated by the Vietnamese Communist Army (Chaw: 2002).

The fall of Saigon is announced by radio, to the soundtrack of *White Christmas* sung by Bing Crosby. The film director, by using such a tranquil song, gives the viewer the feeling that the film characters are moving in slow motion. A Vietnamese woman is portrayed, wearing her white *ai doi* -a symbol of Vietnameseness in exile- while, in an act of desperation, punching the American soil. Meanwhile, General Thuy silently retires to his

[81] General Thuy despite having lost any hope, still plants the chilli seeds, giving hope to the Vietnamese exiles about their being capable of rooting themselves to the United States, making it their home.

bed, sits down, takes off his glasses next to the family shrine, and commits suicide by cutting his wrists. As Lam (2005) says, suicide was the most drastic action committed by those who thought they had lost honour by being on the losing side of the war.

Timothy Linh Bui frames a group of Vietnamese people saluting Viet Nam while singing the Vietnamese national anthem, a woman, dressed in traditional Vietnamese clothes, cries while holding her *mala*[82]. The only Vietnamese who are not emotionally disturbed by the fall of Saigon are the Vietnamese refugee children. The director makes Hoa physically express, by hitting Sergeant Lance, the anger that his own mother, after hearing the Americans were leaving Viet Nam, felt toward an American soldier: "*the day she heard the news of the fall of Saigon she looked at an American soldier standing next to her and she wanted to kill him*" (Chaw: 2002).

While the old generation still has bitter feelings about the defeat at the hand of the Vietnamese Communists, the younger generation has not been so directly, and therefore so deeply, affected by this event. The Vietnamese-American film director is able to discover his own history thanks to the narratives and the emotions he witnessed while writing, and scouting for Green Dragon (2001).When Timothy Linh Bui was asked if he strongly felt any particular allegiance toward the American-Vietnamese conflict he replied:

> When you go to Vietnam they call it the "American War", and when you visit the American War Museum (in Hanoi -Ed.) it's all turned around. It's all a matter of perspective. When I'm over there I understand where they're coming from and when I'm here, I understand the American perspective. I will say this, that the Vietnamese have moved on much more than the Americans have - they've been

[82] *Mala*: Buddhist equivalent of a Christian rosary.

through so much strife and warfare that this conflict is a part of their past while it's still a very painful period to visit for the United States (Chaw:2002).

The impossibility of getting over the sorrow of the American-Vietnamese war has affected the Americans, but also some members of the older generation of the Vietnamese-American diaspora who have continued to preach against the Vietnamese Communist Government and their policies. Such Vietnamese-American individuals still see in the Vietnamese Government the element they have to fight and that forced them out of their home country. They cannot be healed from the wounds caused by the American-Vietnamese conflict.

Some Vietnamese-American, like Hai, did not want to be refugees. The film director shows how some Vietnamese refugees started developing emotional problems caused by home sickness, but most of, from the family fragmentation they experienced. However, despite still living in Camp Pendleton, they begin to absorb American culture. The Fourth of July, America's Independence Day, is celebrated inside Camp Pendleton. As America celebrates its independence, Hoa and Tai decide to leave the refugee camp and to get married. However, the feeling of nostalgia the Vietnamese exiled feel for their home country cannot be erased.

The Vietnamese exiled wanted to start new lives, while at the same time they were scared of the unknown and mysterious America and the prospect of having their identities transformed:

Tai speaking to Sergeant Lance: *Do you know why they don't want to go?*

Sergeant Lance: *I've heard a lot of reasons.*

> Tai: *This is one of the reasons: because they are scared. They are afraid. Like I am afraid. I'm afraid about their lives how they are going to be tomorrow. I'm afraid of never seeing friends once again.*

The Vietnamese refugees prefer to live in a liminal state whereby they are in America but still surrounded by their Vietnamese compatriots. The Vietnamese exiles, while in Camp Pendleton, can keep retaining their Vietnamese identity without compromising it. They don't need to learn English and they do not have the need to blend with America's mainstream society. In the refugee camp the Vietnamese are able to be nostalgic of their own country and to contemplate it without the worries of having to adjust to another dislocating and displacing journey. Timothy Linh Bui shoots the Vietnamese refugees having mixed, even contradictory, feelings about America and Viet Nam. However, being part of two diametrically opposed cultural systems make the Vietnamese diaspora, as Lam (2005) states, particularly prone to this kind of mutually opposed consciousnesses.

The film director makes Tai sing his own composition about the nostalgia for Viet Nam and their new American lives. The diegetic music help the viewers understand the contradictory feelings felt by the Vietnamese refugees. The action that gives Tai the courage to get out of the refugee camp is provided by Sergeant Lance who makes Tai witness the American dream. All the American grandeur about which the Vietnamese refugees have speculated, is testified. Tai, creating his own American narrative, describes America to his fellow Vietnamese refugees:

> Instead of taking us out to see something that we've already seen or known, let us hear it for the first time as if we were locked up in this place for three months and had never seen what America really looks like (Russell: 2002).

The symbolic acceptance of the Vietnamese exiled that life outside Camp Pendleton is possible is the red chilli that has grown out of the seeds that General Thuy planted. The Vietnamese refugees pass it around and smell it as if to make sure this chilli had the same smell and texture of the Vietnamese ones.

Timothy Linh Bui, in *Green Dragon* (2001), does not forget to mention the Vietnamese boat people and their dreadful home seeking journeys. Tai, on the day of his wedding, is reunited with his brother that escaped Viet Nan, with Minh and Anh's mother, on a boat:

> Tai's brother: *We tried to escape one more time. But now our sister had turned into a living ghost. She had refused to eat...And lost all faith in God. We shared a five meters boat with about a hundred people. You couldn't bring anything along. No food, no water. Just one shirt on your back. I gave her my hand to squeeze, she would do it every so often. Just let me know that she was still with me. A week later people started to die. The elders first, then the children. People would wake up next to their loved ones and realize they had died in their sleep. Our sister was turning pale, a day later she stopped squeezing my hand. And in order for the boat to speed up, we had no choice but to throw the dead overboard.*

The arrival of Tai's bother at Camp Pendleton symbolizes the increasing remoteness of Tai to his home country. Tai has nothing holding him to Viet Nam anymore: all his immediate family is with him, and the others who are not have succumbed from the war or to their home seeking journey. Tai's only hope is represented by the United States. The Vietnamese-American film director was in the same position as Minh and Anh when they arrived into the United States. His family rebuilt out of ashes their wealth and Vietnamese-American.

Timothy Linh Bui ends *Green Dragon* (2001) by having Tai and Sergeant Lance have a picture taken together as friends, each one embracing the other, and by having Minh placing the photo that Lance took of him, his sister and Tai eating noodles on Camp Pendelton's board in the hope his mother can trace them. As argued by Naficy (2001), photographic images are used by the director in a fetishistic manner to emphasize his connection with his past and ancestral country. Photos are used so as to evoke the past, and construct the film narrative structure. Furthermore, searching into the past of the first wave of Vietnamese-Americans makes Timothy Linh Bui aware of his family's vicissitudes after they left Viet Nam. Therefore by making a film about the first Vietnamese refugees in America, the film director reconstructs and makes audible a narrative than otherwise would be ignored, one that challenges the American films' traditional narrative of Viet Nam and the American-Vietnamese conflict.

Victor Vu

Victor Vu is a Vietnamese-American film director and screen writer who was born and raised in Southern California. He has a Bachelor Degree in Film Production from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. His first feature film was *First Morning* (2003), and his second *Spirits* (2004).

First Morning (Buổi Sáng Đầu Năm) (2003)

First Morning (2003) is written and directed by the American-Vietnamese filmmaker Victor Vu. The film is set in California, made for a general audience, and produced by Strange Logic Entertainment. The actors are all of Vietnamese ancestry. There are very few critics' reviews of the film, but one has characterized the film as follows: "[...] Vu's direction is often more earnest and plodding than inspired still tells an important story, in which immigration is clearly a means to economic success and security but also a source of deep dislocation and loss." (Hornaday: 2006).

The film is set in Orange County, California. It narrates the story of Tuan's family and their escape from the Communist-governed Viet Nam. Their journey to the United States is saturated by pain and sorrow and leads to Tuan's family fragmentation. Tuan discovers the hidden secrets of his family during his visit to his parent's house in Orange County, California, a few days before the Lunar New Year celebration. However, the joy preceding the *Tet* celebrations is overtaken by the sadness Tuan's family experience after his younger sister Linh's disappearance. The young American-Vietnamese man starts questioning his parents and Uncle Nam about his family's past, which has been stained by the violence

towards the women and betrayal by men. However, Tuan's mother's death brings reconciliation to his dismembered family.

The film starts by presenting footage of the fall of Saigon in 1975 and some images of the Vietnamese boat people after the Communist Government established itself in Viet Nam. The film director, by using scenes of real life, wanted the audience to witness the real and immense suffering of the Vietnamese people after the United States retired from Viet Nam. Victor Vu, by using archive footage, does not fictionalize the journey of homelessness and displacement that Vietnamese refugees experienced after the fall of Saigon. However, the documentary style footage is soon replaced by the fictive filmic style images. From the initial scenes of enforced departure of the Vietnamese from their homes and mother country, the film director presents the audience with the images of Tuan walking though Little Saigon a few days before the *Tet* celebration.

The film director presents the audience with a Vietnamese young man who seems not to be displaced anymore. The smile on Tuan's face contrasts with the images of the painful and distraught expression of the Vietnamese leaving their country. The Vietnamese, from a journey of expulsion, are now faced by what Lam calls "jubilation of a new status and wealth". He argues that:

> The American dream has over time chased away the Vietnamese nightmare. And compared to the bloody battlefields, the malaria infested New Economic Zone and communist gulags, the squalid refugee camps scattered across South East Asia, the murders and rapes and starving and drowning on the high seas, California is still paradise (Lam A: 2009: 171).

The viewer is presented with close-ups of Vietnamese dragons and firecrackers. The images of Little Saigon confer a sense of joy and serenity to the viewer. Victor Vu, while presenting Viet Nam as a place of sorrow and agony, presents Little Saigon as a "Vietnamese" paradise. In Little Saigon, the ethnically Asian-coded objects, and the predominance of red in the frames, indicates to the Western audience that the young Vietnamese is walking through a Vietnamese area. The ethnically coded Vietnamese items also symbolize Victor Vu's belonging to the Vietnamese community and its past. In other words, the film director uses Vietnamese objects to express the part of his Vietnamese identity.

Victor Vu uses a long shot to frame the neighborhood where Tuan's family lives; the place is a typical American middle-class area. From a journey of home-seeking, the Vietnamese have now found a prosperous new home in California. The identity of the exiled Vietnamese has shifted from a traditional one to a hybridized American one where the refugees could now experience what Andrew Lam (2009) defines as the American dream. From the backwardness Victor Vu shows in the archive footage, he shifts to showing the Vietnamese-American becoming bewitched by the idea of progress. From a Communist-imposed credo, the Vietnamese-American experienced the freedom offered by the capitalist market, and free market.

Tuan's parents' house is characterized as being a Vietnamese household. Victor Vu, before Tuan enters the family's house, gives a close-up on some Vietnamese firecrackers and a red amulet. The film director, by framing such ethnically coded objects, and by showing Tuan carrying Vietnamese food in red celebration boxes, is re-stating that the film takes place a few days before the celebration of the New Lunar Year. Tuan's parent's house is constellated by Vietnamese objects. The director presents Tuan's mother as an ill woman,

and his uncle Nam as physically embodying the pain of the Vietnamese-American conflict and the abused suffered in the Vietnamese re-education camps. Nam is framed as a man in a wheelchair wearing a military style jacket and an orange beret. The film director makes clear to the audience the fragmented nature of the Vietnamese family:

> Nam, while Tuan tries to awaken his mother: *She's very weak.*
>
> Tuan: *Uncle Nam, what's wrong with her.*
>
> Nam: *Your mother has a stroke. It happened a few weeks ago.*
>
> Tuan: *Why didn't anyone tell me?*
>
> Nam: *Maybe...She didn't want to worry you.*

However, by presenting Tuan's mother as being so considerate and fragile, Victor Vu represents the stereotypical Vietnamese woman: a suffering individual dedicating her life to the health and wealth of her family. In contrast, Victor Vu represents Tuan father as an individual who is hostile and resentful toward his son:

> Tuan: *Why didn't you tell me that mum was sick? I need to know these things.*
>
> Father: *Your mother just came home from the hospital. Everything is fine now.*
>
> Tuan: *I should be here if anything happens to her.*
>
> Father: *Why? What can you do for her?*
>
> Tuan: *I'm her son.*
>
> Father: *Listen to me. After you and Linh took off...I'm all she has now, understand?*
>
> Tuan: *What did you say? Where's Linh?*
>
> Father: *That's enough. No more questions. I'm tired.*
>
> Tuan: *What the hell did you do to her? Answer me.*

Tuan's father represents the authoritative and despotic stereotype of a Vietnamese man. However, Tuan's hybrid identity is expressed by the disobedience and disrespect the

Vietnamese-American shows with regard to his father. In Vietnamese traditional society disregarding one's parents is considered to be a strongly immoral act. The tension between traditional Vietnamese customs and American life style creates tension among the family and undermines its unity. Tuan's father resents his offspring's choice of having left the familial home to live on their own. The director shows how the discrepancies between American habits and Vietnamese traditions creates friction between the people having left Viet Nam in adult age and those who were raised and born in the United States of American.

In contrast, Nam is the understanding and comprehensive male figure, with whom Tuan and Linh take refuge; he resembles the ideal American father. Uncle Nam has insight into Tuan and Linh that nobody in the family has. Victor Vu mostly frames Uncle Nam in his studio, surrounded by his paintings. The Vietnamese man conveys his pain and sufferance through his paintings:

> The paintings in the film serve several purposes, both visually and thematically. I see Uncle Nam and his paintings as one character and they are inseparable. Only through the paintings, can his struggle be realized and understood. Unsettling images fashioned out of colors symbolize a life time of pain and sorrow (Vu: 2005).

The Vietnamese traditional customs perpetuated by the Vietnamese-American are a central theme of *First Morning* (2003). The diasporic Vietnamese film director questions the morbid attachment the older generation of Vietnamese-American feels towards Vietnamese traditional culture. The eternalized Vietnamese "purity" is embodied by Linh. The Vietnamese young woman, that Uncle Nam describes as the perfect Vietnamese daughter. To further accentuate Linh's embodiment of Vietnamese feminine stereotype, Victor Vu presents her wearing a white *ao dai*. As Lieu (2004) argues:

> Symbolically the *ao dai* invokes nostalgia and timelessness associated with a gendered image of the homeland for which many people throughout the diaspora yearn. Journalist Nguyen Hoang Nam has observed that the meanings associated with the ao dai have been "perpetuated by countless puppy-love, maudlin poems and novels that engraved, for the most part, the traditional concept of female beauty: innocent, frail, chaste, shy, and softly spoken." The *ao dai* conjures romantic images of a Vietnamese past that is pure and untainted by war" (Lieu: 2004: 313-314).

Linh, during *Tet*, is introduced to Vincent, a Vietnamese-American man who is soon going to become a doctor. Victor Vu, by showing how Vietnamese families try to arrange marriages, make the spectator aware of the constant pressure young Vietnamese-American people are put through by their familial units. Moreover, the film director informs the viewer of the middle-class positions that the first wave of Vietnamese landing in the United States have now achieved in American society. While the other women at the *Tet* celebration's lunch are wearing Western clothes, Linh by wearing the *ao dai*, is expected to impersonate the character of the good Vietnamese girl. Vincent's mother comments on Linh: "*She's grown into such a beautiful well mannered young woman.*" Vincent's father adds that "*It's hard raising kids in America. They get distracted by too many things.*"

Linh's interaction with other men is carefully monitored by her father. Despite Linh being harassed by a Vietnamese drunken man her father accuses her of being ill mannered, flirty and immoral. Linh's father, as Confucian traditions dictate, wants to keep his daughter pure and chaste until she is ready to be married:

> Linh's father after the drunken man has importuned her: *What man would want to marry you now? Mr Loc is looking for a virtuous daughter-in-law. You were acting like a whore! You act like a tramp and you'll pay for it one day. Is that what you want?*

Victor Vu is showing that being a woman is difficult in a Vietnamese-American household trying to keep alive Vietnamese traditions. Even when living in the United States, diasporic Vietnamese families impose Vietnamese traditional morality, which has particularly severe consequences for the Westernised daughter. Chu Miniter (2007) reports that when Vietnamese men were asked what they most expected from their daughters, the most common answer was obedience. Furthermore, young Vietnamese males were reported saying that they wanted to have a girlfriend who is very American but a wife who is deeply Vietnamese (Chu Miniter: 2009). These statements illustrate the pressures to which Vietnamese-American women are subjected.

The film director shows the contradictions within the Vietnamese-American diaspora. From one side the old generation of Vietnamese-American try to impose on their offspring a Vietnamese traditional culture; on the other side, the younger generations adapt to the American environment and have to manage a shift from a Vietnamese identity to an Americanised one. What, for others, may appear to be contradictory cultural traits, become normalized in the Vietnamese-American culture of the younger generations who were either born in the United States or arrived at an early age. The younger Vietnamese-Americans have the ability to move between the traditional Vietnamese culture preached by their parents, and the American mainstream society, without any major problems. While the second generation of Vietnamese-Americans in *First Morning* (2003) speaks Vietnamese at home with their parents, among themselves they speak English. By using English language, as their main one, the film characters show their belonging to American mainstream society. Victor Vu, Andrew Lam, and other Vietnamese diasporic film directors and writers talk about their hybrid position in society. However, in their work it appears that the hybrid identity they have is not problematic as such for them. Their Vietnamese-American culture primarily poses a problem

for the older generation Vietnamese and their will of imposing what they perceive to be traditional Vietnamese culture, on the new generations of Vietnamese-American.

Linh, despite her immaculate appearance, feels entrapped by her parents and fights against their will by not dating Vincent. Like her maternal uncle, she expresses her frustrations by painting. As Victor Vu (2005) argues:

> The fish paintings reflect Linh's feeling about herself. She, like the carp, floats alone in the dark abyss. Painting appears to be a form of therapy, as it is for Uncle Nam. Linh finds temporarily relief in projecting her feeling of hopelessness and alienation into her paintings.

When Uncle Nam asks her why she does not enjoy Vincent's company she replies: "*Why? To please my parents*?" However, her uncle says that she should look towards her happiness and ignore her parents' requests and impositions. The woman uses rejection and elective mutism to fight against her father's domineering personality. Victor Vu makes the audience perceive Linh's gradual liberation by showing her praying at the Buddhist temple with an extradiegetic American pop song. The Vietnamese-American woman is transformed from a shy and secluded person into one who enjoys the future doctor's company and attentions. However, as Uncle Nam comments, "*Your parents were very pleased. They thought their plan had worked.*" In reality, however, Linh is able to reshape her parents' will into a gateway to personal liberation and freedom of expression. Linh's inner and dormant identity is liberated by the social reality she sees when going out with Vincent. Despite the couple going to Vietnamese bars, the young woman is able to transgress from traditional Vietnamese values that her family tries to impose on her. Linh's radical change happens while in a night club with her boyfriend. The once immaculate Vietnamese woman gets "polluted" by

drinking alcohol and getting drunk. Linh rebels toward Vincent's male authority by asking him "*Do you think you know what's good for me*?"

However, the film director, by showing images of the drunken Linh in the club interwoven with shots of Linh's recurrent nightmare of finding dead fish covered in blood in her house shower, conveys to the viewer the feeling that Linh is deeply disturbed by some experiences. When Linh finds out Vincent brought her home she runs into the kitchen and points a knife at him. From this episode, the viewers are informed that the Vietnamese-American woman has undergone a sexual trauma. Linh's mother seeks help for her daughter from a Vietnamese diviner. However, Linh does not trust them and shows her frustration with her mother by refusing to go and see the Vietnamese diviner: "*I'm tired of your superstitious nonsense! Stop wasting your money.*" Here, the director uses a particularly stark example to show the difficulty of reconciling two very different value systems. For the older generation, reconciliation was often not possible. And yet, for the younger generation, a bridge between different cultures had to be formed.

Victor Vu makes the audience experience the differences between Vietnamese traditional habits and the expectations of the new generations of Vietnamese-Americans, and how generational difference have detrimental effects upon Vietnamese-American families. The first generation of adults having left Viet Nam after the fall of Saigon, still perform "magic" rituals that they used to in their mother country, such as sprinkling rice outside someone's front door to please the spirits so they don't bother their house's inhabitants. On the other hand, as is also shown in *20 Nights* (2005), such rituals are conceived as useless superstitions by the new Vietnamese diasporic generations. For the director, the younger generations have in a sense, 'progressed' by rejecting this more magical concept of the world.

Linh's mother is convinced that her daughter's troubled existence is caused by angry spirits following her. Psychologically, the viewers perceive that the woman has been sexually traumatized: in fact she was raped by Thai pirates during her family's escape from Viet Nam. More practical help is not seen, by Linh's family, as a method by which Linh can sort out her behavioral problems.

Victor Vu makes Vietnamese traditional culture appear backward and having damaging effects on the Vietnamese-American on which it is imposed. At the same time, the Vietnamese-American film director is aware that Linh's mother is simply not able to conceive of forms of help outside the cosmological world she grew up surrounded by. The older Vietnamese Americans find it difficult, perhaps impossible in some cases, to adjust to a country whose values are almost diametrically opposed to traditional Vietnamese Confucian one. As the same time, Vietnamese-American young generations have problems with Vietnamese culture and combine it with Western practices and beliefs. Inevitably, this creates serious tensions. Lam (2009) explains the distinction between the generations: while he considers himself to be an American, his father considers himself to be a Vietnamese exile living in the United States.

The miscommunication between the American Linh and her Vietnamese mother makes the daughter cut her wrists. However, while the young woman's mother does try to help her daughter, Linh's father -in a stereotypical chauvinist Vietnamese manner- is more worried about his daughter embarrassing his family. Like the family Tran Anh Hung portrays in *At the Height of Summer* (2000), Linh's father is more interested in preserving a good facade of his family than of solving the familial idiosyncrasies:

Minh: *People are going to talk because of you. They think there's something wrong with this family.*

Linh: *Who cares? Let them talk. You should have left me to die!*

The film director keeps presenting the audience with the tension arising from the problematical meeting of Vietnamese culture and American mainstream culture. The "impurity" of the young Vietnamese-American hyphenated identity is the point of negotiation between Vietnamese culture and American cosmology. The impure culture arising from the meeting of the Vietnamese and American cultures is the space in which the directors have themselves mostly grown up. This is primarily what enables them to be able to shift with ease between the Vietnamese and the American, and appreciate both perspectives. The Vietnamese diasporic directors are, on a daily basis, punctuated by the opposition of the cultures they have been growing up with, and which, for this reason, permeates their films.

Linh finds brief happiness in the bar in which she works as a waitress. From being a shy and hermit girl, she becomes a seductive woman indulging in sex, drinks and smoking. The young woman's search for liberation takes place though committing self-defeating acts. Linh, by pleasing Vietnamese-American men's sexual desire is not liberated, but is again enslaved to men's will. However, while Linh finds a space where she can escape her father's authoritative and brutal presence, her mother is the scapegoat for her husband's temper and Linh's difficult personality. The Vietnamese woman is both ignored by her husband and daughter. However, the film director makes Tuan appear as the only family member who is appreciative of his mother. Mothers are portrayed as having a particularly difficult time: as having to mediate between the father's traditional Vietnamese identity and the children's hybrid identity.

Linh's mother: *Linh, are you going out again? I made your favourite pudding, remember? Have some. It's very good. I'll leave it here for you. Don't go out tonight. Stay home. Darling, I love you so much. We had to endure so much suffering...just to get to America. So we could have a future. Why do you keep wasting your life like this?*

Linh: *What future? The way this family is now...Was the price I paid worth it?*

The Vietnamese woman expresses her love for her daughter by making her favorite food. However, Victor Vu, by presenting the viewer with the image of Vietnamese traditional food recalls immediately their experiences and expresses Linh-and Victor Vu's- identity and belonging to their Vietnamese ethnic identity. The viewer does not see if Linh is going to eat the ethnically coded food her mother has prepared her. However, the audience is led to believe-by the way the young woman ignores her mother- that she does not eat it. By refusing it, she denies, and rejects the tradition Vietnamese identity that Linh's family wants to impose on her.

Inside her own home, and outside of it, Linh is subject to male violence. Her father beats her up with a broom for no logical reason, and one of Linh's dates wants to force her to have sex. Men perpetrate their abuse of Linh by considering her a woman of loose morality. It seems Linh cannot help but being intimidated by men if she performs the role of the good Vietnamese woman or if she impersonates the character of the sensual young lady. For the director, it is important to emphasise for the audience the phallocentric role the traditional Vietnamese male perpetrates towards Vietnamese women of any generation.

Victor Vu, once again makes Uncle Nam's commenting on his unfinished painting a metaphor for Linh's life history and her family's troubled past:

> Uncle Nam: *I've struggled with this painting for so long. It seems I've made the same mistakes over and over again. But it's alright, I suppose. The older the painting, the more valuable it becomes. No matter how similar they appear, each layer is unique. Old layers are not worthless. They become the roots...the foundation for each painting. With each layer, the picture changes and something new is revealed. What's on the surface can be easily altered. It's the old paint underneath that remains intact. But be careful. The new layer is delicate. One slight brush and its original lines may be lost forever. But with time, it will solidify and maintain its beauty and character. Only with time...If you decide to keep this baby, you will suffer more if you stay in this house.*

Moreover, the director (2005) comments that Uncle Nam's monologue here is at the core of the film: from the film director's point of view, Linh's family vicissitudes creates the structure of the film for which the audience can get closer to the Vietnamese-American family's situation.

Linh's disappearance is a device by which Tuan can explain to the audience when the family started to become fragmented. Victor Vu makes the audience understand the motivations of Linh and Tuan's family leaving Viet Nam and the dynamics that made it crumble during their home-seeking journey. Uncle Nam's return home after having been in a reeducation camp is a means by which the director can help the audience understand the anti-communism expressed by many of the older exiled generation. Anti-communist feelings are widely shared among the diasporic Vietnamese-American community, predominantly by the older Vietnamese exiled generation. The younger generations, however, brought up away from Viet Nam, feel removed from this conflict and, as is the case here, can portray a more balanced scenario.

The differences between the older generation who feel Vietnamese, and the younger Vietnamese-American generation feeling more American than Vietnamese seems to make

rapprochement an impossible challenge. As Tuan tells his mother, about her doing everything to please her husband:

> *I don't know why you put up with him.*
>
> Kim Anh: *It's the way life is. I've accepted it.*
>
> Tuan: *Why? We're not in Vietnam. Your life doesn't have to center around him.*
>
> Kim Anh: *Your grandmother used to recite this saying: In the family, she must follow her father. In marriage, she must follow her husband...As a widow she must follow her son. A woman's work is never finished.*

While Tuan has accepted American customs, his mother, considering herself Vietnamese, is not willing to change the traditional role of the Vietnamese woman. Despite her husband having betrayed her with another woman he met in the United States, and having left his wife, daughter and brother-in-law in Viet Nam, Kim Anh- like a benevolent god- redeems her husband from his immoral actions. What 'unites' the women in Vietnamese diasporic film is the ability they have of making men feeling guilt free. Traditional Vietnamese women accept their inferiority toward the male and always excuse their immoral behavior. While men can thereby be excused from their amoral actions, the same mercy is not traditionally extended to the female.

Victor Vu shows that Minh, after he left Viet Nam with Tuan, was able to forget about Viet Nam and his family very quickly. As Tuan says, "*My father was ready to leave Vietnam behind. I was still a child back then. Still, how could I forget my homeland*?" Tuan's father wants to forget his Vietnamese family and start a new one. However he is unwilling to change the authoritative style that characterizes men in traditional Vietnamese society. Victor Vu presents Minh as a man that, like his generation generally- be it in Viet Nam or the United

States- has the formality of a traditional Vietnamese man without the morality that should characterize this. As Minh reminds his child, he deserves respect simply because he is his father. However, while the Vietnamese man is portrayed a being a loser, Tuan's mother, once arrived in the United States, is framed as being a woman with good entrepreneurial skills.

Victor Vu in *First Morning* (2003), like Tran Anh Hung in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), praises Vietnamese woman, especially mothers, for their endurance and for the wealth they have brought to their families. Both these directors present women as individuals that, through sacrifice and endurance, were able to preserve their families from fragmentation and poverty. In contrast, traditional Vietnamese men are presented like despotic individuals: egotistical, self centered and indolent. Both Vietnamese diasporic films are a celebration of women's sacrifices and endurance. The diasporic film directors, even if they sometimes portray Vietnamese women as an exotic fetish, or as having magical ideas, show them as being the pillar of the Vietnamese family. Vietnamese women are, for them, the ones who keep Vietnamese culture alive and transmit it to their offspring. As Bouriel and De Ment (1997) show, most American-Vietnamese women continue to preserve the Vietnamese traditional culture and traditions. Essentially, from the diasporic Vietnamese film directors' point of view, it is older Vietnamese women who have maintained a Vietnamese identity among the American-Vietnamese diasporic groups, and who should be greatly praised for this difficult achievement.

However, much like Tran Anh Hung in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), Victor Vu in *First Morning* (2004) presents men as being more able to adapt to new cultures, indeed to perhaps forget about the past. While Minh is telling Linh a Vietnamese bed story her father complains to his wife:

Don't you have any happy stories to tell the children? All I hear about are virtuous wives who turn to stones...Why not a European fairy tale? Like Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, or Cinderella...?

However, Kim Anh does not agree with her husband because her life has not being a being a happy one and she is willing to show her offspring that unhappiness and pain are part of people's lives, especially her own family's existence. Kim Anh is unwilling to transform the painful and desolated displacement journeys Vietnamese people endured to find a new home. Such a history should, for her, not be substituted with an untroubled and happy narrative. The sacrifices the Vietnamese boat people went through in search of a better life should not be forgotten.

However, while Kim Anh accepts that her life has not been a happy and easy one, she is in denial of the sexual assault that Linh suffered. However, Linh's mother, by accepting the crude reality of their distressed escape from Viet Nam, takes responsibility for Linh's psychological problem, whereas her husband denies his daughter's mental trauma:

Tuan: *What's wrong with her?*

Minh: *She's fine. Go back to sleep.*

Tuan (in English): *Linh, are you ok?*

Minh: *It's nothing to worry about. Go to bed.*

Kim Anh: *We should take her to a doctor.*

Minh: *I've already told you. She doesn't need a doctor. This is nothing to share with the rest of the world.One day, she'll grow out of it...and everything will be forgotten. Linh, it's best not to say anything. No matter how much it hurts...or makes you sad, don't show it. Nobody understands your pain anyway, so why bother?*

Minh's attitude is a typical Confucian Vietnamese traditional one. Sufferance and sorrow should be masked to give people the impression that the individual and their families are not touched by any kind of problem. Victor Vu, by showing this attitude applied in such a detrimental context, comments upon the damaging attitudes of certain traditional Vietnamese values. Whereas Kim Anh is a woman attached to her Vietnamese identity in a positive way, being a good mother, virtuous woman and wife, Minh, according to Victor Vu, keeps hold the worst side of Vietnamese traditional culture. Tuan's father is depicted as merely authoritarian especially toward his daughter.

The experience of the family in *First Morning* (2003) represents the traumatic events and suffering of all Vietnamese people in their position: Uncle Nam's traumatic experience of the Vietnamese reeducation camps, family fragmentation, betrayal by the husband, displacement experiences, Linh's rape, generational and ethic differences, cultural adjustment, and death. However, Victor Vu also makes these themes appear unique to Tuan's family. The director, by making Minh saying: "*Nobody understands your pain anyway, so why bother?*", makes the viewer feel that, nonetheless, the traumatic experiences lived by Minh and Kim Anh's family unit are unique, personal and therefore cannot be understood by the other two millions of Vietnamese that escaped from their mother country seeking for new home and a new life.

Tuan's family gathers at Kim Anh's hospital bed. By dying, the Vietnamese virtuous woman heals the sorrow and pain each family member feels for another. Victor Vu represents Kim Anh as a Jesus-like figure, that with her immolation, is able to redeem people from their troubled past. Kim Anh dies the day before *Tet,* which, as the first morning of the New Year,

has purifying powers. Her death deflates the family's frictions. It can be seen as an act of self-immolation- the ultimate sacrifice- that is able to unite the family:

> Extradietic voice of Linh, in English: *It is believed that the first morning of the New Year will reflect on the fortune or misfortune of the year ahead. All the problems and all the worries are left behind and all the offenses will be forgiven.*

Victor Vu makes the viewers aware of the meaning of the Vietnamese *Tet* celebration. The Vietnamese-American film director makes his parents' culture understandable for the Western audience, some, probably most, of which will be unfamiliar with Vietnamese culture and traditions. The director wants to make sure that this part of the audience are aware that Vietnamese history and culture are more complex, nuanced and diverse than has been traditionally presented in Western mainstream films on Viet Nam.

The diasporic film director, to further show and pay homage to Vietnamese traditional culture, frames Linh and Minh praying in front of the family's ancestral altar. The objects displayed on the shrine are ethnically-coded: the incense sticks, and the bowls containing offering for the family's dead relatives. This typically Vietnamese paraphernalia reinforces Victor Vu's Vietnamese identity and shows the audience his hybrid nature. The Vietnamese-American film director is able to incorporate Vietnamese culture, while criticizing the male-centered traditional Confucian mentality that sees women as inferior beings. The film director also frames Minh saying:

> In Vietnam, people don't celebrate birthdays. Instead, they celebrate the anniversary of a person's death. It's strange. How we go through life sometimes, without noticing the people we love the most.

> We wait until they pass away then gather together and cook great meals to honor the day they left us. Why do we think about each other the most when it's too late?

Victor Vu, by having Minh explaining the significance of death anniversaries, informs *First Morning*'s (2003) viewer of the importance of the death anniversary in Vietnamese culture. Moreover, the director, by making Minh realize the incongruities of Vietnamese traditional culture, marks the positive change Minh made after his wife's death. Minh is framed as becoming more hybridized and therefore more critical and aware of his typical Vietnamese chauvinistic behavior.

Tuan and Linh's father now pours tea for his offspring, as their mother used to do, and every morning Minh offers to Kim Anh's spirit a fresh cup of tea. Minh now, finally, pays homage and shows respect to his wife. The film director creates a magical narrative about Kim Anh's death. For no apparent reason, Kim Anh's death pacifies the family and brings its unity back. The mother has magical and supernatural powers and is almost comparable to a god-like figure. Victor Vu can be criticized for romanticizing the figure of Vietnamese mother and, more generally women. However his attitude toward women is symbolic of the appreciation and respect the younger males of diasporic Vietnamese communities feel about their mothers.

Victor Vu portrays Kim Anh as a heroic figure who was able to transform her family's life and was able to sew the fragmented back together, and even change the nature of her narrow-minded husband. Furthermore, the film director by framing Linh saying: "*This is our home now* [meaning the United States]. *I don't think she's left us* [referring to her mother's spirit]", makes the viewer aware that the United States is the Vietnamese-Americans' new home, and that therefore the American-Vietnamese diaspora has concluded

its home-seeking journey. Victor Vu invites the film viewers to not feel sorry for the vicissitudes Vietnamese boat people had to endure during their journeys, but, rather invites the audience to celebrate the achievements of the Vietnamese who left their mother country in search of a new home:

> Kim Anh's extradiegetic voice: *Who can measure the cost of freedom? Who can question the road we took? The ocean is tainted with the blood of our people. But the tides are only droplets in the downpour of tears we left behind. How does a violent rainstorm compare to a world of strife? How does a howling tempest appear beside a wretched spirit? Every spring must endure a winter. Every lullaby utters a mother's grief. Every hope demands a sacrifice. Oh dear child, do not mourn for me. Death is not the greatest loss. The greatest loss is what dies inside while we will.*

The American-Vietnamese film director, through Kim Anh's concluding monologue, criticizes Vietnam's communist Government by saying that the Vietnamese boat people would have been chained to a world without freedom if they had not done something dramatic to change their lives. Finally, their escape was worth the pain they had to endure: they have found a better place in which to live.

Spirits (Oan Hồn) (2004)

Spirits (2004) is the second feature film by the American-Vietnamese Victor Vu. It was entirely filmed in one location in Santa Ana, in Orange County, California. However the events in the film are supposed to take place in modern day Viet Nam. The Californian location was apparently chosen because the film crew was able to find an easily accessible location full of banana trees and tall grasses, similar to a Vietnamese landscape. The film was shot in two months (Le: 2004). It was produced by Strange Logic Entertainment and has been marketed as being part of the ghost film sub-category of the horror film genre.[83] The actors are American-Vietnamese. The critical assessment of the film is very limited indeed: there are a very small number of amateur online reviews but nothing more. These have tended to focus upon the poor skill of the film director and writer, and of the actors.

The film is composed of three interlocking stories in all of which a young Vietnamese writer named Loc is a main characters. The first episode is called "The Visitor". Loc is in search of a reclusive place where he can write, when he sees a house that looks abandoned and he enters it. However, the house is a gate to another dimension where the wandering souls roam and make themselves visible to humans. In the house Loc meets Hoa, the woman the writer has always dreamed of. The two fall in love with each other when the Vietnamese writer discovers she is a damned soul.

The second episode is called "Only Child". Loc, after having experienced the other side of life, is under the psychiatric care of Linh. The young psychiatric nurse is unable to

[83] Horror films are divided in four main sub-categories: the gothic -based classic tales of horror adapted from horror mythology and novels; supernatural, occult and ghost films - involving the interventions from spirits, ghosts, witchcraft and the devil; psychological horror -involving criminals and serial killers- which look at psychological states and psychosis- ; finally, monster movies -characterized by natural and secular creatures wanting to inflict death and destruction- (Cherry: 2009: 4-6).

believe that Loc has been affected by a mental pathology and she sees him as an individual driven by passion. The writer and psychiatric nurse fall in love and then marry. However, their relationship becomes tense because Linh is not able to conceive. The psychiatric nurse in the past had a very loose life, she committed abortion a few times and the spirit of an unborn baby chases Linh. When the young nurse gets pregnant she gives birth to a handicapped baby girl, a scenario that will lead Linh to kill her daughter and commit suicide.

The third and last episode is called The Diviner. A few years later, a spirit medium and *feng shui* expert called Lan is called by Linh's family to go to her old house and perform rituals in order that her soul can rest. In the old house she finds Loc, living as a hermit. The woman is actually a fake diviner. However, Lan, by entering the house, finds a gateway to the world of the damned souls. Having discovered such suffering, the medium commits suicide. The film is set in Hoa's house and the marshes surrounding it.

The Visitor

At the beginning of the film there is a female extradiegetic voice which, later in the film, the viewer identifies with Hoa, recalling the magical and unfortunate fate of those entering the house. Loc arrives at Hoa's house one night looking for shelter. Hoa is in the kitchen cooking some food. Victor Vu reassures the viewers by presenting Hoa as a good, traditional girl cooking and singing Vietnamese traditional songs. The woman offers Loc shelter and invites him to join her for dinner:

> Extradiegetic voice of Hoa (while Loc is writing): *The world of a writer...is the world of his imagination. But when reality is more fantastic than imagination...Isn't that what he's always dreamed of?*

Victor Vu is inspired by old Vietnamese ghost folk tales. The film director, by making Hoa comment upon reality being more sensational of creative power than imagination, remarks about his Vietnamese cultural heritage and its power to create ingenious narratives capable of evoking Vietnamese Confucian philosophy on human existence:

> Growing up in America, I was told many ghost stories from Vietnam. These stories had such a lasting impression on me because they were not meant just to scare. They were emotionally driven, offering a spiritual and philosophical look at our existence… With *Spirits*, I wanted to make a film that really encompassed the nature of a Vietnamese ghost story - a film that evokes the same excitement and intrigues as when ghost stories are told in the dark, from one generation to another (Le:2004).

The film director, by making a film based on such stories, evokes and pays tribute to Viet Nam, its traditions, and the Vietnamese side of his identity. At the same time, *Spirits* (2004) condemns traditional Vietnamese male chauvinism and the way in which it imprisons women, reflecting the American side of the director's identity.

Victor Vu makes the audience aware that Vietnamese ghost stories are not focused on terrifying the viewer. The Vietnamese ghost tales are centered on reflection upon the actuality of human existence. The film maker, by showing how some of the film characters break some Confucian roles makes the audience aware of the difficulties, and sometimes hypocrisies, in adhering to a traditional Vietnamese culture. In particular, as will be seen, the film director criticizes the traditional Vietnamese feminine stereotype whereby women are supposed to obey in order to be accepted by men.

Hoa makes Loc fall in love with her by taking care of him and preparing him food. In this instance food is used to discretely seduce Loc. Food is given sensual properties. The

Vietnamese girl prepares the Vietnamese romantic writer some typical Vietnamese food. By framing traditional Vietnamese food the film director shows the audience the "real" food of his ancestral country. Moreover, by making the woman having traditional Vietnamese manners, and being able to master Vietnamese traditional cooking, Victor Vu is trying to recreate Viet Nam outside Viet Nam. The incarnation of Vietnamese style and manner is represented by Hoa. The young woman is representative of Viet Nam's disappearing traditions and culture. Hoa is visually very different from Loc. Loc wears Western style clothes while Hoa wears traditional Vietnamese robes. Furthermore, Victor Vu, in showing Vietnamese culinary traditions, reiterates his belonging to Vietnamese traditional culture. The traditional Vietnamese potteries Victor Vu uses in *Spirits* (2004) have the function of representing Viet Nam in its "pure" form. The director has made a concerted effort to make the film look as authentically Vietnamese as possible because, as in the case of *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), it is supposed to take place in Viet Nam. The pastoral Viet Nam, where Hoa's house is situated, pullulates with the extradiegetic sounds of crickets and cicadas. The sound of these insects is a common feature in diasporic films representing Viet Nam: *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993), *Cyclo* (1997), *At the Height of Summer* (1999) and *Three Seasons* (1999) portray Vietnamese natural life with the same sound effects.

The Vietnamese femininity Hoa incarnates is further enhanced by her playing the *dan tranh*, a typical stringed Vietnamese musical instrument.[84] However, the frailty of Hoa, a delicateness highly appreciated as a model of Vietnamese femininity, is symbolized by a cut on Hoa's hand caused by one of the dan tranh strings snapping. The film director idealizes, romanticizes, and constructs Hoa as an ethereal figure in a way similar to the manner in which classical Vietnamese poetry and songs portray virtuous Vietnamese women. Victor

[84] *Dan tranh*: a plucked zither of Viet Nam. It is composed of a wooden body and steel strings. The d*an tranh* is often played as a solo instrument and it often accompanies poetry recitals and *cai luong* dramas (www.dantranh.com).

Vu, by setting the film in contemporary Viet Nam, and, at the same time, framing Hoa with such Vietnamese traditional models of femininity, pays homage to Vietnamese traditional culture and beliefs. At the same time, the film director is aware of the abuse and sacrifice a woman has to endure by having to incarnate all the Confucian norms on femininity.

A close-up on Loc's hands, while cleaning Hoa's bruised hand symbolizes the affection and desire Loc feels for the young Vietnamese woman. Moreover, the writer's passion towards Hoa is subtly manifested by the mooncakes[85] he gives Hoa. Loc gives Hoa the mooncakes on the night of a full moon. Victor Vu frames the bright full moon with a medium shot. The viewers are led to belief that Loc gives Hoa the pastries during the *Tet Trung Thu* festival. Traditionally mooncakes are eaten during this festive event. The moon gives ambience for a Vietnamese audience, while also providing a more spectral atmosphere to the Western viewer. Furthermore, the director gives the spectator ignorant of Vietnamese traditions some insight of his ancestral culture. Moreover, for the part of the audience familiar with Viet Nam's cultural heritage, the film encourages a revival of Vietnamese old traditions. Victor Vu, by making such subtle references to Vietnamese traditional heritage, makes the viewer aware of his knowledge of Vietnamese customs.

It is during the Tet Trung Thu' s night, symbolic of the union the Vietnamese writer wants to establish with Hoa. Loc asks the young solitary woman:

---

[85] Mooncake: a typical Vietnamese pastry filled with a salty egg yolk symbol of the moon. The pastries are the culinary focus of the *Tet Trung Thu,* a Vietnamese festival, of Chinese origins, that celebrates the autumnal harvest. The *Tet Trung Thu* festival, occuring on the fifteenth day of the eight lunar month, takes place between mid and late September (Nguyen, Cost and Beisch: 2006). In the past, women and girls held mooncake contests. It was believed that the winner of the competition would have no trouble finding a husband (Polon and Cantwell: 1983). The *Tet Trung Thu* festival dates back to pre-colonial Viet Nam. Old Vietnamese traditions linked the *Tet Trung Thu* festival to the celebration of fertility and to the fate that linked destined spouses (Nguyen and Kendall: 2003).The mid-autumn festival is observed in both Viet Nam and Vietnamese diasporic communities (McLeod and Nguyen: 2001).

I was wondering why you are not married [...] I just think that someone kind and gentle like you would make someone very happy.

Hoa's extradiegetic voice: *She's exactly like those female characters in Loc's novels. The feminine image he worships is a frail and soft beauty...a dreamy innocent girl on the old stories and songs. How can I compete with a character of fiction?*

Hoa's ghost finds itself in trouble fitting in with the feminine ideal proposed by Vietnamese classical tradition. The ironic situation is indicative of how the ideal traditional Vietnamese woman is so complex that it cannot even be embodied by a spirit. However, Hoa gets close to the feminine ideal Loc writes about in his novels. The frail nature of the Vietnamese lady emerges when she tells the young writer that she lives on her own because it is the only way people cannot hurt her. The female character sees herself as weak and in need of the protection of a man like Loc. Hoa comments that her fate is pre-destined and the sufferance she has to endure are dictated by karma. As the director states, "The film is about karma, fate, and reincarnation… It really deals with what we do in this life will affect us in, perhaps, after life." (Le: 2004)

The film director makes the viewer aware of the notion of karma and its significant role in Vietnamese culture. *Spirits* (2004) is a film based upon old Vietnamese traditions. The film maker uses Vietnamese traditional culture to create his cinematographic production. As Hoa's extradiegetic voice narrates:

If he knew the truth...would he still love her? The female character in his novels...no matter how beautiful and talented...always have to depend on men...enduring betrayal, loss, and even abandonment. Weakness and vulnerability are seen as both a virtue...and the way to attract men. What must I do to be Loc's ideal woman...the source of his inspiration?

The film maker questions the position of the Vietnamese traditional ideal of femininity. The Vietnamese female stereotype is based on the idea of fragility and sensibility. Women, in Vietnamese traditional society, had to endure men's abuse. However, it has been argued that Vietnamese women in contemporary Viet Nam suffer the same fate as their predecessors. Females are both expected to be *thuy mi* (gentle) and *doang trang* (proper) (Welch Drummond and Rydstrom: 2004). Furthermore, the manner in which Victor Vu frames Hoa's bruised body wrapped around the bed recalls a romantic painting. It is the Vietnamese frailty and femininity that makes Loc love Hoa. The ghost seduces her victim by amplifying her feminine side.

Vu make the audience aware of the kind of social pressure Vietnamese females have traditionally faced. The director frames the Vietnamese woman having such a weak and vulnerable personality in order for her to get attention from men. Hoa was sold by her father to a wealthy man to be his second wife. The young's woman father sold her to clear his gambling debts. The diasporic Vietnamese film director, having the experience of both American and Vietnamese cultures, overtly shows his disapproval of treating women in this manner, and by doing so, is consciously detaching himself from the traditional Vietnamese male view of women.

Hoa's spirit possesses Loc during his sleep and makes him write a message on the wall about the story of her married life and murder at the hands of her husband. Hoa's ghost cannot rest in peace because she was not buried following the Vietnamese funerary rituals. As her extradiegetic voice tells the viewers:

> Since then, my spirit has been condemned to this place. People often say, time can heal all wounds. But some scars will never heal...even beyond the grave. Now, Loc is my replacement, enthralled by the

> tragic powers of this house. Often, he still sits in my room for hours...unable to separate between reality and fiction...between the living and the dead. Perhaps I have wronged Loc...though the love I found in his heart was also an illusion. Perhaps I have resorted to trickery and deceit...when I appeared to him as the girl he's always wanted. But I don't owe any apologies to this life. I am now unshackled. I am free...to move on to a better place.

Hoa's final monologue further reinforces the relentless critique of the female condition in Vietnamese society. The film director, as in *First Morning* (2003), attacks the Vietnamese male centered traditional values imposed upon women. Victor Vu inveighs against the 'love' Loc feels for the young woman: it is clear that the writer's affection toward Hoa arises from her subservience, lack of personality, rather than from the full expression of Hoa's self. The young woman, once dead, transfers her pain into Loc. The viewers are not lead to negatively judge the dead Hoa. On the contrary, the audience is guided to feel relief for the woman, condemned to a painful afterlife caused by men, now finally liberated. Victor Vu, in a similar fashion to Tran Anh Hung, celebrates traditional Vietnamese woman for managing to cope with traditional Vietnamese men and society. Their films pay homage to the often forgotten Vietnamese women.

Only Child

Loc after his encounter with Hoa spends his time unable to write, staring out the window. Linh, a psychiatric nurse, looks after the writer's mental health. Loc had attempted to commit suicide to spend the rest of his time with the dead Hoa:

> Linh: *In Vietnam psychiatry is a neglected field. There's a lack of medicine and resources...and no specialized clinics or hospitals. Ashamed of the stigma, family members often hide patients at home.*

Victor Vu, in this instance, more than romanticizing Viet Nam, again seems to criticize the traditional Vietnamese approach to mental problems. This develops further the film director's statement in *First Morning* (2003) on the choice Linh's father made for her not to see a doctor after she was raped. Victor Vu, by making such statements, attacks the Vietnamese mentality that wants people to hide the "shame" of having a mentally troubled member of one's family.

The traumatized Loc does not remember anything of his past but just the presence of Linh and her kindness toward Loc. Once again, Loc is falling in love with a woman that gives him an image of Vietnamese stereotypical femininity. However, the apparently caring Linh in reality was disowned by her parents because she stole her father's money and spent it on her disreputable and criminal friends. The young woman is not the moral person Loc think she is. The writer is trapped in his own narrative.

Victor Vu's female main characters always have a double personality that is imposed on them by environmental conditions in which they live. The lack of freedom makes these women subservient and caring, and at the same time, from a male perspective, self-interested and egoist. However, the film director does not see the unfortunate female characters as being self-centered. The tension Vietnamese women experience in such traditional Vietnamese society is so strong that they cannot help but behave in this schizophrenic manner. At one level they have to interpret the role of good Vietnamese women, while, at the same time, they are frustrated by the role Vietnamese society throws upon them. Victor Vu's hybrid identity, punctuated by disjunctures between Vietnamese values and American culture, is reflected by the approach of the film director in portraying women being trapped in these two conflictual ways of being.

The writer and psychiatric nurse get married and buy the house Loc lived in with Hoa. Loc's mother, as is tradition in Vietnamese households, goes to live with her son and daughter-in-law. Victor Vu, following the traditional Vietnamese style, and the Western narratives circumscribing mothers-in-law, portrays the woman as being hostile to Linh. However, Loc's mother, compared to his son, can see the truth lying beyond Linh's apparent candid manners. Loc's perception of reality is confined to the male realm and cannot comprehend the opposite worlds Vietnamese women live in.

The pressure exercised on Vietnamese married women to have children is another theme Victor Vu touches upon in *Spirits* (2004). Both Loc and his mother are concerned by Linh's infertility. The young women cannot conceive because the spirit of an unborn child is following her. Linh has the malevolent child in her life because she repeatedly got pregnant, and repeatedly committed abortions, in her pre-marital life. The psychiatric nurse's dishonorable life has led her to be unable to conceive and to be harassed by the ghost of an unborn child. In Vietnamese contemporary society, premarital sex and abortion are often considered to be stigmas of Western culture (Marr cited in Liamputton and Nguyen: 2007:79). After the *Doi Moi* reforms, people had more freedom and they were exposed to a major influx of Western culture. The Vietnamese scholar Nguyen Thanh Loi claims that Vietnamese parents condemn pre-marital sexual intercourse, especially associated with female virginity, as a way of preventing their offspring becoming Westernized and subservient to consumerism and libertarian ideas (Marr cited in Liamputton and Nguyen:2007:79).

Victor Vu creates tension between an old style and modern Viet Nam. The forces driving people from traditional Vietnamese culture towards a Western influenced one are

present in the Only Child episode. Linh is trapped between the two diametrically opposed moral systems. The ambiguity felt by Linh is shared by many Vietnamese diasporic people of both first and second generations. The tension between past traditions and contemporary Vietnamese practice is represented by the offering Linh gives the baby ghost in order that it leave her in peace. Linh, instead of getting a check-up from a psychiatrist, burns an offering for the child to leave her alone. The same dilemma faces Linh's mother in *First Morning* (2003), when she goes to the diviner to see if her daughter can be cured or whether her destiny is to be unhappy and chained to her past for the rest of the young woman's life. In both cases, the two Linhs are left to struggle with their past without having the support of their very traditional families. Hoa suffers the same destiny of isolation.

Linh's mother-in-law decides to call a diviner to help her daughter-in-law to get rid of the ghost child. The spirit follows her because the young woman does not acknowledge it. Linh, by ignoring her past and her abortions, is escaping from her "true nature". The contradictions felt by the psychiatric nurse are ones that constellate the existence of the diasporic communities: the tensions between orthodox and modern ways of living. The altar at which the diviner performs the ceremony is covered with Vietnamese paraphernalia; there are incest sticks, food offerings, and other objects used for the ritual. As stated by Naficy (2001), ethnically-coded objects and food have, in film, the function of making a non Vietnamese environment look like Viet Nam. The perfunctory manner in which these ethnically-coded objects are displayed in this setting is a sign of the confidence Victor Vu feels about Viet Nam and its cultural heritage.

The film director gives his audience glimpses of traditional Vietnamese culture for the public to acknowledge his belonging to, and familiarity with, the film director's ancestral

land and its traditional culture. As Victor Vu says, he hopes that the audiences walk away with some insight on a unique side of Vietnamese culture. And that they are entertained (Cinespot: 2004). The film director argues that *Spirits* (2004) is a truly Vietnamese film

> The original story took place in three separate cities, Los Angeles, Toronto and Saigon. But we decided to set everything in Vietnam, to give a real authentic Vietnamese feel and therefore, we can really call it a Vietnamese ghost story (Cinespot: 2004).

In contrast, Vietnamese films made by non-diasporic Vietnamese film directors such as Do Minh Tuan, do not display such conscious Vietnameseness in their films. The Vietnamese film directors concentrate more on exploring Vietnamese society and its context, rather than the focusing on recreating Viet Nam. Creating a real and authentic Vietnam- but sometimes resorting to anachronism and cliché- is just a worry concerning diasporic Vietnamese filmmakers eager to capture Viet Nam's quintessence.

Ironically, the child's spirit appears to Linh while she is working in the psychiatric hospital. The only comfort the psychiatric nurse finds is to go and pray in a temple. However, the new life the young woman wants cannot be attained. Linh's 'loose morality' is still present in the young nurse despite her desire to get rid of it. Victor Vu, to portray Linh's character in a very ambiguous manner, makes her smoke and hang out with her prostitute friend. Female smoking, as argued above, in Viet Nam is still considered to be an act performed by immoral women.

Linh's karma makes her give birth to a handicapped girl. Linh's life is governed by the needs of her daughter. Linh's child is the reincarnation of the spirit she killed many times. The spectator is supposed to feel sorry for the spirit that so many times was supposed to

become human. There is a slight contradiction in Victor Vu's narrative here. Certainly, if the spirit of the child was stopped from having a human reincarnation, one can equally argue that that spirit, in the past, itself committed something for which it would have been problems being born. Indeed, perhaps neither the mother nor the child are to be blamed for the events signposting their lives. However, the film maker makes Linh's child accuse her mother of being guilty for the abortions Linh repeatedly committed. Therefore, Victor Vu seems to morally judge the psychiatric nurse and the careless way in which she rejected the unwanted children. In the past abortion was not seen as a crime but as a morally wrong action (Liamputtong and Nguyen: 2007). However, the practice was severely condemned by the Vietnamese community. Liamputtong and Nguyen (2007) argue that women commit abortion to save their family's reputation. Furthermore, the social pressure of maintaining female pre-marital virginity pushes women into committing this act. Many women in Viet Nam live this experience in solitude and pain; some of the women believe the fetus has a spirit and it cannot be reincarnated; other felt depressed because they could not fulfill their first pregnancy (Liamputtong and Nguyen:2007).

Victor Vu, in making Linh responsible for choosing to end her pregnancies, makes a very chauvinistic statement. The film director, instead of showing the social environment for which the psychiatric nurse chooses to commit abortion, simply finds moral fault with the woman. Ironically, Linh, despite her apparently immoral nature, devotes her life to taking care of people affected by psychotic behavior. While Victor Vu makes the public aware of the stigma Vietnamese people attach to mental illnesses, he does not explain why the psychiatric nurse goes through so many pregnancy interruptions. It is highly disrespectful to women to show abortion, a process that in Viet Nam is lived in lonely circumstances, in such

a lighthearted, bigoted, and unequivocal manner. The director's approach to such delicate and painful issues reflects how his Americanness is informed by traditional Confucian morality.

The Diviner

The Diviner represents the circularity and never-ending nature of Hoa's destiny, transmitted to Loc, which the writer then shifts onto Lan and which will in due course be transmitted onto her son Bao. Lan, a gambler, fake diviner and feng shui expert, is sent by Mr and Mrs Phu, Linh's parents, to Loc's house to perform rituals intended to harmonize and make peace between them and their daughter. However, Lan enters the same dimension that Loc entered the first time he put a step into Hoa's house. Loc is by this stage a damned spirit condemned to wandering in the old house. Linh's spirit is also confined to that place; however she appears only during night time. Lan is a morally corrupted woman who puts money above morality. However, she feels a primordial love for her son Bao. Bao, on the other hand, negatively judges her mother for the immoral ways she earns a living. However, the diviner, after Linh and her daughter appear to her, helps to try to free their spirits from the house, but Loc does not allow Lan to do this. The writer wants to trap his wife and daughter's spirits in the house so he can achieve immortality.

Linh commits suicide because she cannot bear to see her daughter in such pain and because Loc's life is centered around the image of Hoa:

> Linh: *You've have already written three books about Hoa. How much is enough? No one cares about me anymore. Your mother doesn't care, your daughter doesn't...And now you don't. How can I compete with a ghost? Do I have to be dead for you to love me?*
>
> Loc: [...] *It turns out, you're a typical woman! Your jealousy makes you completely irrational! [...] You've gone too far. You're out of control.*

Linh feels alienated from the rest of her family and lives in moral solitude. Loc's life is still punctuated by the love he felt for the incarnation of Vietnamese traditional femininity incarnated by Hoa. The ghost of the young married woman took such traditional characteristics so the writer could love her and not because they were an intrinsic of her personality. Loc is trapped in the world he created in accord to his own fantasies and, in a damning commentary on the Vietnamese male, even the spirit-form female with supernatural power struggles to keep up with Loc's expectations of femininity.

The filmic style of the film conforms to a trope common to many horror films. Victor Vu presents his characters as being psychologically tormented and in search of revenge. The frightening scenes are mostly set at night where the film director can more easily create suspense by playing with darkness and shadows. He uses rustles, screams, cries and whispers to convey to the audience the sense of a ghostly world. The style of the ghosts of Hoa, Linh and his daughter are very similar to the ghostly images proposed by the contemporary Japanese film genre[86] being framed wearing white outfits, having long hair covering their faces, having opal-like eyes sometimes injected with blood, and being white as sheets.

The disrespect Loc shows toward Linh drivers her into killing her daughter and committing suicide. Loc's room is surrounded by *hang ma*[87] (votive offerings) for Linh and his daughter. The ghost story writer, even when dead, keeps the females of the house under control. Lan is also trapped under Loc's spell, and, guided by Linh's spirit, she hangs herself.

---

[86] *The Ring* (1998) is a well known example of this style

[87] *Hang ma:* are often paper representations on which are written the intentions and useful things promised to the deceased, gods and saints. The Communist government initially made such offerings illegal. However, the *Doi Moi* renovations made them legal, but, due to the speculative nature of such business, the Vietnamese Government has kept these votive offering illegal during family rituals and in temples during festivals (Nguyen:2006)

The male dominance over women is perpetuated throughout the film. Victor Vu portrays women as being docile objects in the traditional Vietnamese vision of femininity. Women, to find freedom, have to die. However, even death does not give women any more freedom they had when they were alive. Their damned spirits are condemned to go through the pain of existence on a daily basis until someone liberates them. The film director, by showing traditional Vietnamese culture's role for females, shows that his hybrid identity classifies this behavior both as morally unacceptable, but, for some, perhaps unavoidable. Expressing a common theme in Vietnamese diasporic cinema, *Spirits* (2004) is concerned with people's split identity and the difficulties of keeping a family united. The family, as in Tran Anh Hung and Tony Bui's films, is portrayed as a unit under tremendous pressure. However, simultaneously, Victor Vu approaches thematics such as abortion, from a very superficial and chauvinistic style, perhaps reflecting the conservative masculine culture that forms part of his identity. Because of this, *Spirits* (2004) does not really empower women, but, rather, offers contextualization of the vicissitudes which the female has to endure.

Ham Tran

Ham Tran was born in Saigon and departed for the United States in 1982. The film director's family was able to leave their home country through the Orderly Departure Program. Ham graduated from UCLA with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Film and Television. His short films have won numerous prizes such as The National Student Academy Award and the USA Film Festival award for Best Short Film (Vaalastaff:2008). His first feature film is *Journey from the Fall* (2006).

Journey from the Fall (Vượt Sóng) (2006)

Journey from the Fall (2006) was written and directed by American-Vietnamese filmmaker Ham Tran. It takes its starting point as the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, and narrates the story of the Nguyen family thereafter in Viet Nam and the USA. It was produced by A Fire in the Lake and Old Photo Film, and shot in California and Thailand. The actors used are mostly of Vietnamese descent, Caucasian American and Latino American. The film received mixed reviews: Seitz (2007) wrote that the film director "achieves the impossible" and called it a "tearjerker". Edwards (2005) said it "deserves to be seen by a wider commercial audience" and is "frequently enthralling". White (2007) suggests that "this *Journey* doesn't know where it's going", criticizing the "careless cinematography" and "clumsy stag[ing]".

The film opens by showing Long Nguyen refusing to leave Saigon despite the desperate pleas of his wife Mai. The consequence of this is that the former South Vietnamese Army high rank officer is captured by the Communists and put in a reeducation camp. Mai,

her son Lai and her mother in law, Ba Noi, stay living in Viet Nam. However, one day Long asks his wife to get the family out of Viet Nam. Mai, her son and mother in law organize the escape out of Viet Nam, by boat. After spending two weeks exposed to unfavorable weather, mechanical problems, and the attack of Thai pirates, the Vietnamese boat people are rescued, and they end up in Orange County, California. The film director, even after the arrival of Long's family in the United States, keeps bringing the viewer back to the Vietnamese reeducation camps showing the audience the painful, and, to some of the audience, unknown experience that Vietnamese dissidents faced after the American-Vietnamese conflict ended. Particularly, the film recalls the family fragmentation and difficult adjustments Long's family- and many other families- had to go through before and after their displacement and home-seeking journey.

Ham Tran explains his reasoning for relying mostly on non-professional actor by saying that the he and his producer Lam wanted to cast people who lived the reality of the reeducation camps and the displacement journey; using individuals who had actually experienced the events in question would make the film more authentic. The director recalls the process of finding these people:

> Charles Nguyen: What was the process of finding stories of immigrants/reeducation camp prisoners? How did you decide which stories you wanted to tell?
>
> Ham Tran: I think the stories were measured with tears. My producer, Lam, will tell you that he cried hundreds of times during the audition process. We held an open call to the community in Little Saigon and San Jose. I didn't want to cast "actors" because I need to keep the film as authentic as possible. Aside from Kieu Chinh and Long Nguyen, everyone else in the film had never acted before. Some were real reeducation camp survivors, and some were actually lost at sea on those over-packed, rickety fishing boats. The audition process was basically, my producer and I talking for a half hour with each person who showed up for the call. We wanted to know from their experiences, at the same time

> gauging whether or not that person would be able to go back to a specific time and emotional place in their life in order to bring to their role. The stories that brought us instantly to tears were those ones that got worked into the script. One example is Miss Kim Chi's story about visiting her husband. She had reenacted the scene so well and it was so moving that almost every detail of her story became Mai's visit to Long at the prison camp (Nguyen: 2007)

The characteristic which makes Ham Tran's film palpably different from other diasporic Vietnamese-American films is the absence of the American. *Journey from the Fall* (2006) presents the viewer with the idea that the American-Vietnamese conflict was a campaign the Vietnamese were facing against themselves. The two Vietnamese factions were fighting to have their country impose either the communist or capitalist model. Both sides were fighting for their country' s independence and to make their country, colonized by various forces in different periods of time, a free and better one.

Ham Tran has the aim of making the Western audience realize that the narratives proposed by Western films about Viet Nam (and which are frequently, in some ways at least, the narratives also constructed by diasporic Vietnamese film makers) perpetuate the myth that the Vietnamese war was fought against the USA, and that the latter was the dominant player in the American-Vietnamese conflict:

> Vietnam was a three-sided war, with North and South at each other's throats, but in the retelling, America has appropriated itself as the central figure in an otherwise complex narrative. Some are enraged, but many are resigned. What they know and won't admit to the American audience is that for them history is a series of personal impression (Lam: 2005: 95-96).

However, *Journey from the Fall* (2006) explicitly states that, notwithstanding the foreign origins of the ideologies in question, the Vietnamese were fighting a war, not against an

external enemy, but between two different kinds of ideology, as Lam (2005) argues in the essay *My Vietnam, My America*. The Western viewer, who is not usually accustomed to Vietnamese post-American-Vietnamese conflict history, is also invited to understand that the Vietnamese-American war did not end with the fall of Saigon. The detrimental effects of the conflict extended well beyond the war itself. The pacification process, for the Vietnamese, did not start until much later.

Journey from the Fall (2006) is a diasporic film which does not contain direct autobiographical narratives. The film director did not himself experience being a boat person or a prisoner. As Naficy (2001) argues, this is sometimes the case with the accented film style Ham Tram's first feature film is constructed through the experiences of those who escaped from Viet Nam.

> Minh T. Nguyen: What kind of research did you do for the movie or did you have any personal experience drawn upon it?
>
> Ham Tran: My aunt who sponsored us to America was a boat person. She left on this boat and then had chicken pox, so they were about to throw her over because they were afraid that chicken pox might spread and get everybody on board sick, so they were going to throw her over the next morning. Then, in the middle of the night, they were hit by pirates and because she had chicken pox, the pirates didn't want to go near her, and so the next morning they were rescued. These unbelievable stories about human endurance and suffering are all within our community. I started finding out, for instance, that my father's friend, who was very high-ranking officer, was in prison for twenty years, and he is the person who sort of kept my dad away from the frontlines, because he knew my dad had a family. So, he did my dad a favor, but after the war, he was arrested and got in prison.
>
> When I started working on The Anniversary my producer Lam told me that his father was killed in an education camp. He was killed without a trial, his body was buried and to this day his family doesn't know where the father's body is. Lam's mom knew a lot of Vietnamese veterans who were in prison, so we started interviewing them and finding out more stories (Nguyen: 2006).

The story begins with a female extradiegetic voice that tells the viewer about the myth of *Le Loi*. In the background, we see burning drawings which represent the salient moments in the myth. The emperor who brought peace to Viet Nam by defeating the Ming invaders, and united the country has been replaced by a Vietnamese war fought between the Vietnamese themselves. Ham Tran's filmic style, which presents the viewer with grained images of bleached colors accompanied by 1930s style music, makes the shots appear like scenes taken from actual archive footage. However, the audience, when presented with a close-up of a bleeding Vietnamese man, realizes that what it actually saw were flashbacks of Long's life. Long is a prisoner in Da Ban reeducation camp: his crime was to be part of the South Vietnamese Army. The political prisoner, whenever he is in dreadful pain, thinks about his family, and especially his young son Lai. The film director, by showing the Vietnamese Communist regime treating people in such a manner, expresses his critical view towards the Vietnamese Government. However, Ham Tran also condemns the American Government for having abandoned the Southern Vietnamese, by having Long say "*The Americans have abandoned us. They've broken their promise.*"

Ham Tran, much like other diasporic Vietnamese film directors present 'the wife', portrays Mai, Long's spouse, as a virtuous and faithful woman that, in order to not to split her family, renounces living in the United States, and stays in Viet Nam so the family can be together. Furthermore, the director does not just show how Vietnamese political prisoners were treated, but also shows the viewer the climate of terror in which people lived their ordinary lives. For instance, the secret police is shown, at night, taking away a man from his house. People were arrested because they were suspected of wanting to leave Viet Nam clandestinely. Individuals had to live with the fear that a knock at the door in the early hours could arrive at any time.

Ham Tran's filmic style is designed to increase the antipathy the viewer feels to the Communist regime, reflecting the feelings of profound revulsion and disapproval that the first generation of émigrés to the United States expressed toward the Vietnamese Communist Government, its supporters, and officers. Ham Tran shoots the slogans and images on the reeducation camps' walls- the Vietnamese flag, picture of Ho Chi Minh and, particularly, the writing *Hoc Tap Tot* (re-education is good)- in a style that remarks on the similarity between the camps and the Germans World War II concentration camps with their motto of *Arbeit Macht Frei*. At the Vietnamese reeducation camp's entrance the prisoners are welcomed with the slogan "*Khong Co Giquy Hon Doc Lap Tu Du*" (nothing is more precious than freedom). The detainees, however, are enslaved in the malaria-infested fields in the New Economic Zone.

However, Ham Tran informs the viewer that the war the Vietnamese fought was between two different Vietnamese ideologies, and not against an invader. The dialogue between a Communist reeducation camp officer and Long explains this clearly:

> Communist Officer: *We know you were a high ranking officer. You don't have to write any more self evaluations. We already know about all your crimes.*
>
> Long: *I've committed no crime.*
>
> Communist Officer: *No crime? You sided with the American imperialist. Waged the war against the revolutionaries. You're a traitor to your country. To your own people. Understand?*
>
> Long: *Traitor to my country? I fought to keep my country free.*
>
> Communist Officer: *Fought to keep your country free. People like you don't even know what it means to free Vietnam. Only now is Vietnam truly free, now that the Americans have abandoned their posts. Your crimes are many. You dared oppose the revolution. But we succeeded. All across the land, we free the people of Vietnam.*
>
> Long: *Did you free people? Or did they free you?*

Communist Officer: *That kind of ungrateful talk will only get you killed.*

Long: *Death is nothing. What's wrong? Where's your smile?*

Similarly, Andrew Lam (2005), in the essay *National Defeat/National Liberation Day* describes how what, for a part of Vietnamese is liberation, for some is considered to be the day the American Army abandoned them and the Southern Vietnamese lost the war, and their country:

> "Flipping through my United States passport as if it were a comic book, the custom man at the *Noi-Bai* Airport, near Hanoi, appeared curious. "Brother, when did you leave Vietnam?"
>
> "Two days before National Defeat Day," I said without thinking. It was an exile's expression, not his.
>
> "God, when did that happen?" asked the man in a comic and exaggerated tone.
>
> "The thirtieth of April, 1975."
>
> "But, Brother," he smiled "don't you mean National Liberation Day?"" (Lam A: 2005: 67).

However, the dialogue between the two politically-opposed Vietnamese men is not balanced, and Ham Tran really wants to show the evil nature of the Communists. In portraying the Communist like this, the Vietnamese-America film director is positioning himself as having similar views to the majority of the Vietnamese-Americans. Ham Tran express his belonging to the anti-Communist Vietnamese identity spread across the Vietnamese-American diaspora by framing the Communist in a such unambiguous and monolithic style. It is not to say that the violent and crude behavior in the prisoner in the Vietnamese reeducation camps is a work of fiction. However, Ham Tran admits that he captures the experience of the Communist from a biased point of view:

> I know that my father is still traumatized by the war. I know it in a way they fear the communist or are very suspicious of the communist, and they have a reason to be because they went through that first-

> hand. But we don't know that, so we interpret their experience and their point of view as being paranoid and whatever, and we shut ourselves off to that. So I think as the 1.5 and 2.0 generation, we need to know these stories and know ourselves so that we can start the healing process for our parents (Nguyen: 2006).

Journey from the Fall (2006) frames the reeducation camps as not just occupied by Vietnamese dissidents, but also by the people who tried to leave Viet Nam, who were also considered to be traitors. Therefore, according to Ham Tran's narrative, the majority of people which left Viet Nam by boat are traitors. In effect, until the *Doi Moi* reformation, Vietnamese-American people were denied access to their ancestral country. The Vietnamese-American film director, despite the film being more overtly focused on Vietnamese political history, rather than on the importance of preserving Vietnamese culture, still frames with attention to detail, the omnipresent, and extremely important in shaping and keeping Vietnamese identity, ancestral shrine and the paraphernalia which goes with it. Vietnamese-American identity is, for him, anchored to traditional Vietnamese rituals as much as influenced by American society.

Vietnamese ancestral worship has such importance for the Vietnamese and the diaspora that it appears as an element in almost every film made by the Vietnamese diaspora. As has been argued:

> Today, even the most Westernize Vietnamese, in Vietnam or abroad, maintain an ancestral altar in the home before which they burn incense or make offerings (McLeod and Nguyen: 2001: 45).

Displaying such ethnically-coded objects represents a process by which the diasporic Vietnamese film director reinforces his Vietnamese identity. However, Ham Tran argues, as

does the Vietnamese-American writer Chang (2006), that being aware of the political history of Viet Nam is just as important to keeping Vietnamese traditional culture alive:

> Mai asking her mother in law: *Why do you tell him the story of Le Loi and Le Lai?*
>
> Ba Noi: *It's part of our history. Everyone should know the history of our country.*

According to Ham Tran, Vietnamese-Americans should know their ancestral country's history in order to be better carriers of the Vietnamese identity handed-down from the older generation. Becoming familiar with Vietnam's troubled recent past, and indeed older history, is a means of healing the spilt identity of the Vietnamese boat people by informing the younger generation of the troubled history of their parents/relatives.

Ham Tran frames Mai, Lai and Ba Noi during their escape passing in the street where the nocturnal market takes place. The director's focus here on the food stalls themselves, and traditional Vietnamese food, makes the audience aware that there is the last chance for Long's family to experience their home-country. The synesthetic properties of such shots are designed to make the diasporic part of the audience nostalgic of Viet Nam. The food the film director frames conveys emotional responses that could be difficult to convey with other tools. The smells, the authenticity, and the sensorial experience of Viet Nam will be lost, possibly forever, when they are on the boat.

While the boat people had abandoned the "real" sensorial Viet Nam, Ham Tran shows that the reeducation camps' prisoners' most palatable experience consists of eating live crickets. Food sharing, in such places, where food was a scarce resource, indicates the humanity and generosity among the prisoners. A Vietnamese man, locked in the same sweaty

room as Long, after hearing that the latter has[88] lost his family, gives him the insect. The act of generosity is used by the director to further distance the inhumane Communist from the human, non-communist Vietnamese. The rice cricket helps Long and his friend to reconnect and imagine their life outside the prison. The two Vietnamese prisoners image how they would cook the rice cricket if they had the chance. Discussing succulent, ethnically- coded food is a way of reestablishing their identity and distracting their minds from the poor life conditions they have to endure in the reeducation camp:

> Long's friend Trai: *Breaded cricket. Then fried.*
>
> Long: *You mean butter-fried cricket, or stir-fried cricket?*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *Rip-off the head, stuff its belly with a peanut. Roll it in flour. Deep fry it and then, dip it in fish sauce with ginger.*
>
> Long: *That's not tasty.*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *You have to stuff it with a peanut!*
>
> Long: *You get the head.*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *Respect the elders!*
>
> Long: Elders, *my ass.*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *I still got it. Give me the body.*
>
> Long: *I get the ass, you get the head.*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *No. I want the body. It's the richer part. How smart are you! Hey! Don't wash out the flavor*!
>
> Long: *I have to wash out the piss!*
>
> Long's friend Trai: *That's the flavor. Hand it over.*

Ham Tran shows the bonding and human warmth carried by food sharing. Furthermore, the film director, by presenting the audience with traditional Vietnamese culinary shots,

[88] Long thinks his wife, mother and son drowned in the sea after the costal guard made their boat sink. One of Long's family neighbors, after visiting a relative, tells him this story.

strengthens his Vietnamese identity in the same manner that showing ethnically-coded objects helps to reinforce diasporic identities.

The vomiting taking place on the boat's deck is a recurrent theme in Vietnamese boat people's chronicles, as Le (2008) shows. The images of the Vietnamese boat people vomiting have synesthetic properties. The camera movement, and its swing that mimics the chopped sea, accentuates and amplifies the sensorial effect. Ham Tram leads the viewer to feeling the smell of gasoline, the fumes, human sweat, and vomit filling the boat's deck. The film director skillfully makes the audience increasingly more hateful toward the Communists. The most malevolent communist of them all is the reeducation camp's major, a refined opium smoker who quotes the Romanian/French existentialist philosopher Emil Cioran and his vision about the acceptance of life's horrors. By showing the Vietnamese Communist in such negative terms, the film director expresses the values and anti-Communist ideology that forms a major part of the identity of the first wave of Vietnamese-Americans.

Ham Tram uses the Vietnamese boat people's narrative, and restructures it in a cinematic form, which reinforces the hatred the Vietnamese first generation feels towards the Vietnamese Government. The first wave of Vietnamese-Americans constructed their Vietnamese identity in opposition to the Vietnamese Communist one. The Vietnamese-American film director shows that gestures of generosity and care are commons even among the Vietnamese crammed into the fishing boat. Mai offers Phuong an orange segment. However, the gentleness and care seem only to be a characteristic shared by the non-Communist Vietnamese. Those, like Phuong's mother, who endured staying in Viet Nam, did it out of loyalty: not to leave because, like in her case, they wanted to be buried next to the

spouse. She knew if she stepped out of Viet Nam she could not have gone back to the mother country: "*I have to reason to leave. If I die...then I want it to be in my homeland.*"

Trai's wife goes to the reeducation camps, bringing him a pot of his favorite dish. The woman wants to give her husband some sensations associated with his life before he was imprisoned by the Communists. The woman, unable, in the circumstances, to show affection to her husband in any other manner, cooks him his favorite food in order to him to taste the love she feels for him:

> Trai's wife talking to Long: *I hoped. I prayed. Let me see my husband. To see his face when he eats his favorite dish cooked by my own hands.*

However, the cruel and inhuman Communist almost stops Trai's wife from getting him the dish she carefully cooked:

> *The first question they asked was what did I have in my bag? They made me dump it out. They poked at it with their guns.* [...] *This dish, I give it to you.*

In the food, Trai's wife is also able to sneak Long a message that tells him where to find his son's drawings (with which there are pictures of the family alive and well in the United States) within the camp; Long having thought his family were dead, having been lost at sea. Food is a carrier of love, companionship, and also physically carries messages of hope and freedom. The will of wanting to be buried in Viet Nam is common among the first generation of Vietnamese-America as shown in Jang and Winn's documentary, *Saigon USA* (2003), which portrays a first generation Vietnamese-American whose only hope is to be able to be buried in his home country. The Vietnamese myth of The Story of Le Nuong is about the

Vietnamese tradition of being buried in the country you were born in (Terada and Larsen: 1989: 99-101). This belief and tradition is still present in, and it is part of the culture and identity of, the old generation of the Vietnamese diaspora. At the same time, however, Ham Tran starts to make the viewer feel aware that generational gaps are present between the Vietnamese-American, as there are among the different Vietnamese generation. Thinking of Viet Nam as a place of cultural and generational homogeneity is part of the Western Oriental narrative and misconception.

Journey from the Fall (2006) revives and makes the viewer aware of the loss of identity of the Vietnamese who left Viet Nam, and the suffering and physical and psychological pain the Vietnamese Communist brought to the dissidents and their families. Such psychological scars are alive and present, and they constitute part of the identity of the first generation of Vietnamese-Americans. The ideological divide between Vietnamese Communist and non-Communist is still strong and felt by the older Vietnamese that live in the United States:

> Andrew Lam writing about his father: "Vietnam remains his only true interest. My interests lie elsewhere. His compass points steadfastly, unwavering, toward Southeast Asia. Mine spins and points at several directions on any given day. He is against normalization with Vietnam, against trade with Vietnam, against travel to Vietnam. He is, conversely, deeply in love with Vietnam, with the idea of a communist-free Vietnam. Anyone who goes there is, therefore, a traitor to the cause. When normalization happened under a democratic president, who later travelled to Vietnam, he became quite ill. And each time he hears of others of his generation, those of the old ruling class- ex military officials, ex-congressmen, and so on- who have gone back to visit since the end of the cold war, he would shake his head and mutter French curses- 'Contes! Cochons! Putain! Merde!'-under his breath" (Lam A: 2005: 42).

The new Vietnamese-American generations can accuse people like Lam's father of being stubborn and narrow-minded. However, a film like *Journey from the Fall* (2006) tries to justify what the old generation of Vietnamese-American had to endure under the Communist Government and which were the motivations that led them to leave their home-country. However, Ham Tran's film is also a gateway that tries to unite old generations of Vietnamese-Americans with the new ones:

> I feel it's my responsibility to make a movie, so my son and daughter, they know why I have to leave my country," says Ho[89], who left Vietnam in 1981 when he was a boy of 16 (Larsen: 2007).

Ham Tran shoots the forest where Long and Thanh escape as if it is a tropical paradise, with close attention to the detail of the green and pristine bamboo canes, and the luxuriant leaves; the director even frames a snail on the edge of a bamboo plant. The green and "pure" forest space is in direct opposition to the muddy, messy and claustrophobic reeducation camp site. The extradiegetic sounds of insects further accentuate the peace and quiet offered by the forest. Long and Thanh's first meal out of the camp consists of plantains[90]. Thanh cannot help but talk of the synesthetic sensations the fruit give him: "*These plantains make me think of banana desserts. Fried bananas...or sticky rice bananas.*" His culinary thoughts represents the life and freedom the prisoner experienced before the fall of Saigon. As Ngoc (1998) argued, the Vietnamese government restricted the food variety the Vietnamese had been used to in pre-communist days.

The centrality of food in Vietnamese culture and rituals was, until the *Doi Moi* reformation, rejected by the new Government. One of the first needs of the Vietnamese

[89] Ho Truc: founder of the Saigon-based television network Garden Grow.
[90] Plantain: a banana containing high levels of starch and little sugar widely used in Vietnamese cuisine.

diaspora, as it is for all diasporic groups, has been to recreate the culinary traditions they have lost during their home seeking journey. Ethnic restaurants and food shops were established in order to recreate the home the immigrants left, and to rebuild, in an unfamiliar environment, their fragmented identity. While the two fugitives eat bananas, Ba Noi is cooking porridge for her family and Nam, the captain of the boat. The Vietnamese boat people are framed while performing daily rituals, such as lighting the incense sticks of a tiny shrine built on the boat, for their ancestors to protect them during their journey. Such cultural traditions are still part of the Vietnamese diasporic identity.

Mai, during her boat escape, reminds Nam of the Moon Festival celebrations in Viet Nam. Mai keeps hold of such memories so she can remember her husband and mother country. Nam claims that such rituals are not going to be lost because "*You can celebrate the Moon Festival anywhere*." However, Mai and Nam are aware that the Moon Festival, if not celebrated in Viet Nam, lack atmosphere. The Vietnamese just escaped from Viet Nam have the nostalgic feelings about their mother country that characterize the first generation of Vietnamese-Americans. Vietnamese traditional celebrations are still observed in the Vietnamese-American community. Such festivals reinforce the American-Vietnamese people's Vietnamese heritage, that otherwise would be lost.

The film director acknowledges the suffering that Vietnamese women, in this instance by being raped by the Thai pirates, had to endure during their home- seeking journey. Ham Tran, unusually for a Vietnamese diasporic film director, does not portray women as sensuous individuals on whom the audience spy in a voyeuristic manner. Rather, they are equal to Vietnamese men in their suffering and sorrow. Vietnamese woman are not carriers of an exotic beauty. The silence that follows the pirates' attack is more poignant that any kind of

dialogue. The use of sad extradiegetic music reinforces the synesthetic experience of such desolated and violent shots.

In the same way as the Vietnamese boat people react with silence to the attack they experienced, so the older Vietnamese generation has been cautious and ashamed of sharing their sorrow with the new generations of Vietnamese-American. As the director says:

> My producer and I interviewed more than a hundred survivors of the reeducation camps and boat refugees, and I would say that 7 out of 10 of everyone we spoke to have not told their own children what they have revealed to us. So we asked them: "Why? Why not let your children know about what you had to suffer in order to come to America?" Their response is very typically Vietnamese, "Why tell them about pain? Why tell them about shame? The past is best to be buried." That would carry these important stories to their graves, and never realize that our youth of today need to know why they are here. The so-called generation gap is not created by age. It's created by silence, a deep burrowing kind that hollows the heart" (Nguyen: 2007).

Ham Tran narrates not only the difficulties of the Vietnamese people imprisoned in the reeducation camp, the vicissitudes suffered by the Vietnamese boat people, but also the difficulty Lai comes across in becoming accepted in American society. The director portrays Lai as being discriminated against by school mates and teacher. The school principal claims to know the pain and sadness felt by the Vietnamese boat people because his grandparents were Irish immigrants and they also embarked on a home-seeking journey. The film director finds the approach of the principal and other Americans to be patronizing to the Vietnamese:

> It irritates me whenever I meet someone and I tell them that I'm from Vietnam, because the immediate response is almost always "Yeah, it's a terrible shame what happened with the Vietnam vets", or

> "Yeah, my [so and so] fought in 'Nam." The war was about Vietnam, not America. We've have been fighting for over a thousand years before the Americans came. Same war. New flags (Nguyen: 2007).

Vietnamese-American people have to struggle to create an identity that does not correspond to the narrative the Americans have constructed about the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese. *Journey From the Fall* (2006) offers a counter-American narrative about the Vietnamese war and the Vietnamese people.

One of the first things Ba Noi does after Mai's family finds Phuong is to cook them some Vietnamese crepes. Ham Tram uses a close-up to frame the wok in which Ba Noi puts the crepe batter. Cooking and eating Vietnamese food is again emphasized as the way in which Vietnameseness is consumed, and incorporated in a non-Vietnamese territory. A clear indication of the traditional Vietnamese woman is represented by Ba Noi's consumption of betel leaves making her teeth going black. Phuong, Mai and Lai are filmed while sitting around the kitchen table cleaning some vegetables. Furthermore, for the Vietnamese consuming Vietnamese ethnically coded food, it is a way in which they can sensorially experience their mother country:

> Phuong: *It's been so long since I've had Vietnamese crepes.*
>
> Ba Noi: *I can't find the ingredients here. I have to buy green beans and grind my own flour.*

In the house there are sensorial traces of Viet Nam all around. Late at night, when Mai and Nam come out from work, the kitchen is alive with the smell of cooked rice, and other Vietnamese specialities such as pork ribs.

The house where Mai's family and Nam live is also ethnically-coded. There are Vietnamese typical objects, such as statues of Buddha, a wok, chopsticks, pottery, crockery etc. which serve the purpose of making Mai's household appear ethnically-Vietnamese. The objects displayed are impregnated with Vietnamese culture and identity. Furthermore, Viet Nam is recreated by listening to Vietnamese traditional music, and Ba Noi telling her grandson about Vietnamese myths. Like most Vietnamese diasporic houses as portrayed in film, Mai's house has an ancestral shrine where incense sticks and other offerings are presented to the dead ancestors. Such ethnically-coded objects are those which give identity and culture to the Vietnamese people living outside of Viet Nam. Moreover, it helps to recreate Viet Nam without succumbing to the sadness the first generation the Vietnamese-American express for their mother country. Such objects, rather, create a sense of shared identity in countries where Vietnamese culture is marginal.

Ham Tran shows the first Vietnamese-Americans as having low status blue-collar jobs. The film director touches here on another sour point about Vietnamese-American identity, which is also further explored in the documentary *Saigon USA* (2003). This frames a Vietnamese man, a former general of the South Vietnamese Army, who, after arriving in the United States, can only get a job as a toilet cleaner. The Vietnamese-American man, recalling this common experience, gets very crossed and tearful. The shame the first Vietnamese-American felt about this was immense, and nowadays, as the documentary shows, these people still feel sorrow about their experiences.

While feeling deeply Vietnamese, the first Vietnamese-American generation started to become Americanized by consuming American culture and products. Ham Tran frames Phuong and Mai's family going to a shopping mall and going on a carousel ride. However,

even so, it is hard for the first generation of Vietnamese-American to consider the United States as their home country because of the immediate family many of them left in Viet Nam. As Phuong remarks, "*How can I ever accept that America is my homeland, when my mother and father are still in Vietnam? I have a past, Mai.*" However, despite their resilience towards becoming Americanized, the Vietnamese-American have been shaped by the new environment in which they live. Mai's household, while ethnically-coded, is also clearly American. The film director frames an American flag next to her telephone. Such an object is symbolic of the Americanization to which Mai, Ba Noi, Lai and Nam are susceptible.

Ham Tran ends the film by having the audience learn how the family is able to restore the all important value of unity they had before the fall of Saigon by openly talking of the painful experience they endured and, eventually, overcome. The film director is suggesting that the best way of healing identity, and overcoming the sorrow of the past, is to share the experience of war, its aftermath and the journey into exile, with the young generations of Vietnamese-Americans. These later generations have not been directly affected by the events but nonetheless have a hybridised identity that, if far from determined by what happened in Viet Nam and on the road to exile, is still influenced by the life-defining events of their older relatives. He wants the home-seeking journeys of the exiled Vietnamese to be shared rather than concealed, and thereby help to defragment diasporic identity. After all, it is in no small way due to the bravery of this first generation that, for him, the Vietnamese community is now able to live peacefully in a free society. While generational cultural differences are, in some respects, insurmountable, some degree of unity of identity can arise through this process.

Summary

With the exception of Victor Vu's horror film *Spirits* (2004), the American-Vietnamese films all focus on aspects of the aftermath of the American-Vietnamese conflict. *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* (1999), *Three Seasons* (1999), *Green Dragon* (2001), *First Morning* (2003) and *Journey from the Fall* (2006) describes how the Vietnamese have been traumatized by the experience of war and the communist regime. The Bui brothers' films also show how the American themselves have been mentally disturbed by the American-Vietnamese war. Generally, all the film-makers articulate the implications and consequences of the conflict in a way that shifts the paradigms of Western cinema.

There are many similarities in the films made by the American-Vietnamese diaspora. In contrast to the dominant trope of the French-Vietnamese productions, Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American women are not eroticized in the films of USA-based directors. Furthermore, the new generation of American-Vietnamese film directors confidently condemn male-centered traditional Vietnamese Confucian values. Vietnamese women, and their female offspring, are depicted as being abused by their husbands and fathers (often depicted as men of loose morals, as is also the case in the French-Vietnamese films). However, the American-Vietnamese film directors do not propose a solution in relation to such abuses. In fact, women in American-Vietnamese films perform the role of the "good and traditional" Vietnamese wife and daughters. However, they passively "empower" women by making females characters perform acts of self-immolation which change males' sexist attitudes toward women. As in traditional Vietnamese literature, the peace is restored when the female character sacrifices herself.

American-Vietnamese film directors, like the French-Vietnamese colleagues, often refer to Vietnamese classical mythology in their movies. Mythology and Vietnamese traditional culture are used to construct/reinforce their belonging to Vietnamese culture, while at the same time, building the hybrid identities of diasporic Vietnamese filmmakers working in both France and the United States. However, identity is not only formed by representing these factors: food is a powerful tool which Vietnamese-American and French-Vietnamese film directors use to reinforce – by consuming traditional Vietnamese dishes- and hybridized –by consuming "Western" food- their Vietnamese identity. And Vietnamese women are associated, by their preparation of traditional Vietnamese dishes, with the preservation of traditional Vietnamese values such as strong familial unity (albeit under severe pressure), and not the phallocentric and sexist ones perpetrated by the typical Vietnamese male.

In contrast to the French-Vietnamese films, the American-Vietnamese films display criticism of the Vietnamese Government. Being politically opinionated- or not- on screen is a major distinction that can be made between the America and France-based film-makers, with the former attaching importance to political commentary in their works. The Vietnamese-American community has historically been very politically active and, specifically, antipathetic towards the Viet Nam Communist Government, publicly showing its outrage and disagreement toward the Vietnamese Government. The American-Vietnamese community includes many individuals who belonged to the Southern Vietnamese army and, as indicated in the previous chapters, they have embittered feeling toward the Vietnamese Communist political class. The film-makers will have, when growing up, certainly absorbed these strongly-held political views within their communities, which exist, in effect, as markers of identity for a certain generation. The sour feelings of the American-Vietnamese towards the Vietnamese Government are clearly shown, for instance, in *Journey from the Fall* (2006).

The American-Vietnamese film directors have transformed and repossessed Hollywood discourse about Vietnamese-war representation. Whereas American films on the American-Vietnamese conflict emphasize the sacrifice of American soldiers, their main role in the Vietnamese-American conflict, and the brutality of the faceless Vietnamese; the American-Vietnamese film directors, in contrast, place the Vietnamese as central characters in the American-Vietnamese conflict. Moreover, the American-Vietnamese films also suggest- in stark contrast to the Hollywood narrative- that the war was primarily between the Vietnamese themselves and not between the American and the Vietnamese.

IX

Conclusions

In the diasporic films examined, both the French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American productions express a conflictual relationship that manifests elements of both a traditional Vietnamese identity and, also, of the modernity that the Vietnamese diaspora has experienced in France, the United States, and, indeed, in modern Viet Nam itself. The Vietnamese diasporic filmmakers express the challenges of situating a coherent identity between Western and traditional Vietnamese cultural practices in a number of ways. The use of ethnically-coded food and objects and the portrayal of Vietnamese women are perhaps the most visually striking means through which they convey to the viewer their hybridized identities. The nostalgia for the traditional family, the perceived dangers of its fragmentation, but, at the same time, the distaste for patriarchal Vietnamese society, are also important expressions of the diasporic identity. The analysis shows how the Vietnamese -American and French-Vietnamese film directors in some ways imagine Viet Nam in a similar manner, but, do also, in certain significant respects, differ in the notions they have about their ancestral country. The divergences of approach can, to a significant extent, be explained by the differing historical experiences of Viet Nam of the two diasporic communities.

A common trope employed by both the French and American filmmakers is the belief that their exilic journeys and the capitalism now experienced in Viet Nam were the reasons for the fragmentation of the family unit that is considered the main expression of a traditional Vietnamese identity. For American-based directors, this process of fragmentation is primarily expressed through conveying the trials of the exilic journeys themselves, the communist reeducation camps in Viet Nam and the process of adaptation to the new country. The

physical separation and disintegration of the family is also portrayed by the condition of Lam Le's Vietnamese Man and by Tran Anh Hung and Tony Bui's portrayal of the manner in which modern capitalistic conditions are seen as eroding traditional practices in Viet Nam itself, especially among the poor Vietnamese. In particular, the practices of prostitution, criminal activity and the detrimental social conditions for the lower orders are all framed as impediments to the continuation of the traditional family unit. Furthermore, modern, hectic Viet Nam is portrayed in stark contrasted to pastoral landscapes which are imagined as 'pure' Viet Nam where traditional Vietnamese life and values are still present. Tran Anh Hung, instead of focusing his films on the Vietnamese diaspora, narrates the tensions between what he constructs as traditional Viet Nam and the Western influences which attack the social and moral structure of Vietnamese traditional society and provoke family fragmentation. A similar narrative structure is used by Victor Vu in *Spirits* (2004), where the film director narrates of the frictions arising between modern Linh and Loc due to the traditional Confucian manner in which the latter expresses his manhood, causing family disintegration. Through focusing on family fragmentation as experienced through these processes, the film makers express the loss and trauma felt by the diaspora that has not previously been expressed in Hollywood or French productions and, also, thereby articulate a connection they feel to a Vietnamese culture that pre-dates both the communist and modern capitalist era. The theme is clearly present in both American and French productions. The narrative style may differ- the former are stylistically similar to conventional Hollywood and the latter are representative of the 'art-house' style- but the message is much the same.

In French-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American cinematic productions, women are typically presented as sites through which tensions between modern and traditional identity are expressed; the former's romanticization of much of its subject matter does not preclude

this. There are stylistic differences in how the female's position is articulated, but there are also some commonalities of overall intention. For both the French-Vietnamese and American-Vietnamese film makers, it is important to 'pay homage' to the Vietnamese woman, and recognize the hardship endured by their mothers and sisters, frequently imposed by the father. The diasporic Vietnamese filmmakers have the sensibility to understand and convey the situation which has historically positioned Vietnamese women as being under men's authority. However, their work also offers no solution that may empower women to challenge the patriarchal authority to which they have traditionally been subjected.

This common approach to the female as an expression of the conflicting values of divergent cultural systems, however, goes hand in hand with a clear stylistic difference of approach to the female subject, mirroring the different cultural attitudes to Viet Nam found in France and the USA. Parallels between the traditional Orientalist approach and diasporic cinema can be seen in the work of Tran Anh Hung, who fetishizes, exoticizes, and eroticizes the female body. However, the female body on which Tran Anh Hung focuses the sensual desire belongs to his wife, and main female character in all his films, Tran Nu Yen-Khe. Therefore it is difficult to be certain whether Tran Anh Hung frames his wife in such an eroticized way to pay homage to her beauty, or if the diasporic Vietnamese film director is expressing a more general point in arguing that Vietnamese are quintessentially exotic and sensual. It seems plausible that he is doing both these things. Moreover, a similar approach can be found in Lam Le, who also embeds his films with phantasmatic French colonial ideology. His main male character *20 Nights* (2005) argues that France is a benevolent mother toward Indochina. Furthermore, this character represents the site of desire that connects the viewer to the Orient. In French cinema, the sensual beauty is usually embodied by women. Lam Le, by making a male portray this role, rearranges, in a very mild way,

cinematic convention and his motive seems mostly to be about making his film more interesting by doing so. The sensual manner in which the Oriental body becomes the site of desire exemplifies how French ideology is part of the French directors' hybrid identity. In other words, this attitude towards 'exotic' bodies is an expression of the influence that Post-Colonial discourse holds over the two film-makers.

The Vietnamese-American film directors, in contrast, do not exoticize and eroticize their Vietnamese characters to anywhere near the same extent as Tran Anh Hung and Lam Le. The camera does not linger longingly over oriental bodies in a manner akin to that of the French directors. Rather, the female in US productions, both mirroring the American diaspora's collective memory of leaving Viet Nam, but also the directors' experiences of growing up in contemporary America, is predominantly the character that most embodies and endures the cruelty of the exilic journey, but who is also shown as suffering traditional chauvinistic Vietnamese patriarchal culture. As such, the filmmakers express their Vietnamese roots, but also, by offering a critique of the traditional authority of Vietnamese men, are distancing themselves from traditionally derogatory views concerning a Vietnamese woman's role, and are thereby manifestly expressing elements of an American upbringing.

An important component of the filmic productions coming from both the French and American Vietnamese diaspora is the centrality of embedded ethnically-coded sensorial objects whose function is to enable the audience to experience Viet Nam as well. Food is the strongest of these elements, enabling the Vietnamese diasporic film directors to provoke multisensorial experiences in the film audience. It is through food preparation and consumption, and also through the placing of traditional Vietnamese objects, that the Vietnamese diasporic film directors' characters- and the film makers themselves- reinforce

their belonging to Vietnamese culture. Such objects can, essentially, be seen as carriers of the Vietnamese identity in a place where such culture and traditions are not dominant. Moreover, the centrality of food is inextricably linked to the fact that it is always the women who prepare it. By preparing Vietnamese-coded dishes, the intention is also to show the female as the conveyor of a traditional Vietnamese identity.

Hybridization of identity is a theme that is also expressed in differing ways, mirroring the different filmic styles (and differing cultural norms) of the US- and France-based filmmakers. For instance, Lam Le expresses, in a subtle fashion, the liminal identity of his characters through having them speak multiple languages. Tran Anh Hung's post-modern referencing of Ozu, Rothko and others enables the theme of identity to gently resonate with the flow of his work. In other words, the two French directors employ techniques to express identity that sit easily with the art house nature of their work. Hybridization is, in contrast, expressed by American-Vietnamese film makers in a more overt manner through framing the tension between the first generation of Vietnamese exiles and the younger generations of diasporic Vietnamese. The family unit is the main site for this expression of the tension between Vietnamese traditional culture and Western culture. Such tensions and differences, between the younger and the old generations of Vietnamese immigrants, are expressed through the language that the diasporic Vietnamese characters choose when interacting with one another. This is symbolic of the hybrid nature embodied by the *1.5*, and younger, generations of the Vietnamese American diaspora, which includes the film makers themselves.[91] While the younger generation of the Vietnamese diasporic communities consider themselves as being liminal products of two diametrically opposed cultures, the

[91] The term *1.5 Generation* or *1.5 G* is used to describe individuals who immigrate to another country early in life, before or during their early teens. They earn the label the "*1.5 generation*" because they bring with them characteristics from their home country but continue their assimilation and socialization in the new country. Their identity is thus a combination of new and old cultures and traditions. (Roberge: 2005).

older generation of exiled Vietnamese sees hybridity as a loss, and as disrespectful toward Vietnamese traditional culture. The problem of inter-generational communication and understanding- a product of very different life experience- is no doubt impossible to completely overcome, but trying to achieve some degree of it is commonly expressed in a positive manner in these films by directors who have clearly grappled with this issue in their own lives.

A further difference between the two communities' film makers' expressions of their identity can be seen in the extent to which they do or do not romanticize Viet Nam. The nature of this distinction- perhaps inevitably- mirrors the differences of experience of Viet Nam of the two exilic communities. The American Vietnamese experience still carries open wounds, while the different experience of the journey to France permits- indeed encourages- a predominantly wistful recollection of the mother country. Equally, this difference of approach also reflects the contrast of immersion in the differing discourses on Viet Nam found in France and the United States. The two French directors, broadly-speaking, portray Viet Nam in a nostalgic, Orientalised way, broadly reflecting French colonial discourse on Indochina, and meaning that French-Vietnamese films can be considered Post-Colonial. In contrast- with the exception of Tony Bui- Vietnamese American directors do not generally romanticize the homeland in this manner, but, rather, see it as somewhere that had to be left in order to 'gain freedom'. For these film makers- reflecting the different values of their diasporic community- the major trope here is Viet Nam's suffering under communism. As such, the country is not romanticized- although homage is certainly paid to the traditional family- but rather, is more perceived as a cage from which one must escape in order to find 'freedom'. In presenting Viet Nam in the manner they do, these directors are, of course,

demonstrating that they are products of their American and French upbringings as much as of Vietnamese heritage.

American-Vietnamese directors historicize their cinematic productions to a better level than the oneiric and highly romanticized narratives framed by their French colleagues. The American-Vietnamese in their films show a political critique of the Vietnamese Communist Government that in the French-Vietnamese films is only marginally touched upon by Lam Le. This difference in approach can certainly be characterized as a product of the differing experiences of the two diasporic communities in relation to their experience and memories of the old country. Most of the American productions describe the journeys which the directors' familes went through while escaping from Viet Nam. It is therefore possible to label their films as autobiographical. However, the French films are also autobiographical in a slightly weaker sense in that it is possible to locate the hybrid identities of the diaspora within the film characters. In the case of both countries, it can also be said that the film makers have produced authorial films due to the multiple roles, and therefore overall control, they have had in their films' production. In other words, the films are, to a significant degree, expressions of their identities. The American-Vietnamese directors express a kind of post-war identity based, at least in part, upon the actual historical experiences of the Vietnamese American community. In contrast, Lam Le and Tran Anh Hung, influenced by the nostalgic French vision of Indochina, create a predominantly oneiric Vietnamese identity.

In conclusion, there are similarities and differences between the French and American-Vietnamese discourses of identity, both of which are clearly syntheses of the old county and the respective new ones. However, what is perhaps most fundamental is that an ethnic minority living in the West is now able to construct its own narrative and

commercialize its filmic products. It can bring them to an audience that has not previously been aware of this alternative perspective, and which will often have only experienced and understood Viet Nam and the Vietnamese refracted entirely through American and French cultural values. This can be seen as a positive development, and is representative of the heterogeneity that globalization is bringing to the media, as Appadurai (2003) predicted.

Filmography

Feature Films

Annaud, J. J. (1992). The Lover. 115 min. Producer: Films A2, Grai Phang Film Studio, Renn Productions, Timothy Burrill Productions. France/UK/Vietnam.

Bui, T. (1999). Three Seasons. 113 min. Producer: Giai Phong Film Studio, October Films, Open City Films. Vietnam/USA.

Bui, T. L. (2001). Green Dragon. 115 min. Producer: Franchise Classic, Franchise Pictures, Rickshaw Films, Spirit Dance Entertainment, TGD Productions. USA.

Chi, M. L. (1999). Catfish in Black Bean Sauce. 119 min. Producer: Black Hawk Entertainment. USA.

Cosmatos, G. P. (1985). Rambo: First Blood Part II. 96 min. Producer: Anabasis N.V. USA.

D'Amato, J. (1978). Papaya: Love Goddess of the Cannibals. 86 min. Producer: Mercury Cinematografica. Italy.

De Sica, V. (1948). Ladri di Biciclette. 93 mins. Producer: Produzioni De Sica. Italy.

De Sica, V. (1952). Umberto D. 89 min. Producer: Amato Film, Astoria Films (in co-operation with Intramovies Italia), De Sica, Rizzoli Film. Italy.

Ford Coppola, F. (1979). Apocalypse Now. 153 min. Producer: Zoetrope Studios. USA.

Irvin, J. (1987). Hamburger Hill. 110 min. Producer: RKO Pictures. USA.

Jang, L. and Winn, R. C. (2004). Saigon, U.S.A. 60 min. Producer: Lindsey Jang, Robert C. Winn. USA.

Kotcheff, T. (1982). First Blood. 93 min. Producer: Anabasis N.V., Elcajo Productions. USA.

Kubrick, S. (1987). Full Metal Jacket. 116 min. Producer: Natant, Stanley Kubrick Productions, Warner Bros. Pictures. UK/USA.

Lam, L. (2005). 20 Nights. 85 min. Producer: L'Autre Rivage, Integral Film, Promotion Production Pictures (PPP). France/Germany.

Levinson, M. (1987). Good Morning, Vietnam. 121 min. Producer: Touchstone Pictures, Silver Screen Partners III. USA.

Noyce, P. (2002). The Quiet American. 101 min. Producer: IMF Internationale Medien und Film GmbH & Co. 2. Produktions KG, Intermedia Films, Mirage Enterprises. Germany/USA/UK/Australia/France.

Ozu, Y. (1951). Early Summer. 124 min. Producer: Shôchiku Eiga. Japan.

Ozu, Y. (1957). Tokyo Twilight. 140 min. Producer: Shôchiku Eiga. Japan.

Ozu, Y. (1957). An Equinox Flower. 118 min. Producer:Shôchiku Eiga. Japan.

Ozu, Y. (1960). Late Autumn. 128 min. Producer: Shôchiku Eiga. Japan.

Rossellini, R. (1945). Roma, Citta Aperta. 100 min. Producer: Excelsa Film. Italy.

Rossellini, R. (1946). Paisa. 120 min. Producer: Organizzazione Film Internazionali (OFI). Italy.

Stone, O. (1989). Born on the Fourth of July. 145 min. Producer: Ixtlan. USA.

Stone, O. (1994). Heaven & Earth. 140 min. Producer: Alcor Films, Canal+, Ixtlan. USA/France.

Tran, A. H. (1993). The Scent of Green Papaya. 104 min. Producer: Lazennec Films (presents) (as Les Productions Lazennec), SFP Cinema, La (co-production), La Sept Cinéma (co-production), Canal+ (participation), Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) (participation), Procirep (in association with), Fondation GAN pour le Cinéma (financial support), Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (participation), Sacem (participation). Vietnam/France

Tran, A. H. (1995). Cyclo. 123 min. Producer: Canal+, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Cofimage 5, Cofimage 6, Giai Phong Film Studio, La Sept Cinéma, Les Productions Lazennec, Lumière, Salon Film, Société Française de Production (SFP). Vietnam/France/Hong Kong.

Tran, A. H. (2000). At the Height of Summer. 112 min. Producer: Canal+, Hang Phim Truyen, Lazennec Films, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Arte France Cinéma. Vietnam/France/Germany.

Tran, H. (2006). Journey from the Fall. 135 min. Producer: A Fire in the Lake, Old Photo Film. USA.

Vu, V. (2003). First Morning. 90 min. Producer: Strange Logic Entertainment. USA.

Vu, V. (2004). Spirits. 90 min. Producer: Strange Logic Entertainment. USA/Vietnam.

Wargnier, R. (1993). Indochine. 159 min. Producer: Paradis Film, La Générale d'Image, Bac Films, Orly Film, Ciné Cinq, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) (particiapation), Le Club des Investisseurs (particiapation), Canal+. France.

Short Films

Tran, A. H. (1989). La Femme Mariee de Nam Xuong. 23 min. Producer: Ecole Nationale Supérieure Louis Lumière (ENS). France.

Tran, A. H. (1991). La Pierre de l'Attente 20 min. Producer: Lazennec Tout Court. France/Vietnam.

Bibliography

(2005). "Vietnamese Diaspora on Film." Retrieved 18/10/05 from http://international.ucla.edu/cseas/article.asp.?parentid=23273.

(2005). "Pastoral Buffalo Boy begins US screening." Retrieved 18/01/05 from http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=02FIL140105.

(2005). "Cyclo Dream". Retrieved 10/09/07 from http://www.vietnamartgallery.com/newsletters/june2005full.htm#2.

(2009). "Dan Tranh". Retrieved 20/05/09 from www.dantranh.com.

US Department of Navy (2007). The Religions of South Vietnam in Faith and Fact. Charleston, Forgotten Books.

Adair, G. (1989). Hollywood's Vietnam. From the Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket. London, William Heinemann Ltd.

Adams, C. J. (2000). The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory. New York and London, Continuum International Publishing Group.

Anderson, B. (1991). Imagined Communities. London, Verso.

Anderson, W. W. and Lee R. G. (2005). Displacement and Diaspora: Asians in the Americas. London, Rutgers University Press.

Andrews, E. L. (1999). "Apocalypse Then: Vietnam Marketing War Films." The New York Times(May 12).

Appadurai, A. (2001). "Grassroot Globalization and the Research Imagination." Globalization 1-21.

Appadurai, A. (2003). Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy Theorizing Diaspora. J. Evans Braziel and A. Mannur. London Blackwell Publishing.

Appiah, K. A. (1992). In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosphy of Culture. Oxford, Oxford University Press

Astruc, A. (1948). "Naissance d'Une Nouvelle Avant-Garde: la Camera-Stylo." Ecran Français(144). Cited in Stam. R. (2000) The Cult of the Auteur. Film Theory: An Introduction. Blackwell, Oxford.

Baudrillard, J. (2004). Simulacra and Simulation. Michigan, The University of Michigan Press.

Bazin, A. (2005). What is Cinema? Berkeley, University of California Press.

Behar, H. (1995). ""Xich lo" Press Conference at the 1995 New York Film Festival ". Retrieved 10 March 2009 from www.filmscouts.com.

Bhabha, H. (1989). The Commitment to Theory Questions of Third Cinema. J. Pines and P. Willement. London, British Film Institute.

Bhabha, H. (1994). Location of Culture. London, Routledge.

Blackwelder, R. (1999). "Return to the Native Inspired by His Visits to Vietnam, Cal-Raised Writer-Director Tony Bui Created "Three Seasons"". Retrieved 13/04/08 from http://splicedwire.com/features/tonybui.htlm.

Blanc, M.-E. (2004). Vietnamese in France: Encyclopedia of Diasporas. Immigrants and Refugee Culture Around the World. M. Ember, C. L. Ember and I. Skoggard. New Haven, Human Relations Area Files at Yale University 2: 1158-1167.

Blum-Reid, S. (2003). East-West Encounters: Franco-Vietnamese Cinema and Literature. London, Wallflower Press.

Bolaffi, G., R. Bracalenti, et al. (2003). Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture. London, Sage Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1982). Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Bousquet, G. L. (1991). Behind the Bamboo Hedge. The Impact of Homeland in the Parisian Vietnamese Community. United States of America, University of Michigan Press.

Bower, A., Ed. (2004). Reel Food. Essays on Food and Film. London Routledge.

Braudy L. and M. Cohen (1999). Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Bryan, T. (1997). Southeast Asian Refugee Women, War and Resettlement Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West. E. Jameson and S. H. Armitage. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press: 569-584.

Buchan, S. (2003). Every tree has its roots. Refugees from Vietnam and their children speak about here and there. London, Refugee Action.

Bun, C. K. and K. Christie (1995). "Past, Present,and Future: the Indochinese Refugee Experience Twenty Years Later." Journal of Refugee Studies 8(1): 74-94.

Buriel, R. and T. De Ment (1997). Immigration and Sociocultural Change in Mexican, Chinese, and Vietnamese American Families. Immigration and the family: Research and Policy on U.S. immigrants A. Booth, A. Crouter and N. Landale. Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 165-200.

Busch, A. M. (2002). "Vietnamese Star Defends Roles." Retrieved 11/03/07 from www.fva.org/200211/story05.htm.

Cam, N. N. and D. Sachs (2003). Two Cakes Fit for a King: Folktales from Vietnam. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press.

Caplan, P. (1997). Approaches to the Study of Food, Health and Identity. Food, Health and Identity. P. Caplan, London, Routledge 1-31.

Chan, S. (2006). My Father and I The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight and New Beginning. S. Chan. Philadelphia Temple University Press 171-180.

Chaw, W. (2002). "Dragon Tales." Retrieved 11/10/05 from www.filmfreakcentral.net/notes/tbuiinterview.htm.

Cheng, S. (2001). "L'Odeur de la Papaye Verte." International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers Retrieved 14/08/09 from www.encyclopedia.com.

Cherry, B. (2009). Horror. Abingdon, Routledge.

Chiu , L. V. (2005). Camille's Breasts: the Evolution of the Fantasy Native in Régis Wargnier's Indochine. France and "Indochina": Cultural Representations. K. Robson and J. Yee. Lanham, Lexington Books: 139-152.

Christopher, R. (1995). The Viet Nam War. The American War. Images and representations in Euro-Americans and Vietnamese Exile Narratives. . Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press.

Chu Miniter. P. (2004). "New Generation Navigates Interracial Marriage ". Retrieved 21/11/08 from www.news.newamericamedia.org.

Chua, L. (1994). "Tran Anh Hung ". Retrieved 10/11/08 from www.bombsite.com/issue/46/articles/1733.

Cinespot (2004). "An Exclusive Interview with Victor Vu." Retrieved 23/10/08 from www.cinespot.com/einterviews09.html.

Classen, C. (1997). "Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses." International Social Science Journal (153): 401-412.

Clifford, J. (1994). "Diasporas." Cultural Anthropology 9: 302-338.

Clifford, J. (1997). Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twenty Century. Cambridge , MA, Harvard University Press.

CNN (2000). "Tony Bui, Vietnamese-American filmmaker who fled the Vietnam War in 1975, discusses returning to Vietnam." Retrieved 16/06/06 from www.cnn.com/chat/transcript/2000/4/27/bui.

Cohen, R. (1997). Global diasporas: an Introduction. London, UCL Press.

Condominas, G. (1997). "Food Practices: a Cultural Heritage to be Preserved." Vietnamese Studies. Eating and Drinking Habits and Cultural Identity. 4: 5-25.

Counihan, C. and Esterik, P. V. (1997). Food and Culture: A Reader. London, Routledge.

Cross, A. (1993). "Portraying the Rhythm of the Vietnamese Soul: an Interview with Tran Anh Hung." Retrieved 10/08/09 from www.accessmylibrary.com.

Crow, J. (1996). "Cyclo." Retrieved 31/1/11, from http://movies.msn.com/movies/movie-critic-reviews/cyclo/.

Crumpacker, B. (2006). The Sex Life of Food: When Body and Soul Meet to Eat. New York, Thomas Dunne Books.

Danet, I. (2005). "20 Nuits et un Jour de Pluie." Retrieved 8/2/11, from http://www.premiere.fr/film/20-Nuits-Et-Un-Jour-De-Pluie/(affichage)/press.

de Baecque, A. (2005). "20 Nuits et un Jour de Pluie." Retrieved 8/2/11, from http://www.commeaucinema.com/critiques/51207.

De Tran, A. L. and Hai Dai Nguyen (1995). The Vietnamese-American Experience: Once Upon a Dream. Kansas City, Andrews and McMeel.

Derderian, R. (2003). Urban Space in the French Imperial Past and the Postcolonial Present. Postcolonial Urbanism. Southeast Asian Cities and the Global Processes R. Bishop, J. Phillips and W. W. Yeo. London, Routledge.

Devine, J. M. (1999). Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second: A Critical and Thematic Analysis of Over 400 films About the Vietnam War. Austin, University of Texas Press.

Do, T. (2005). From Incest to Exile: Linda Le and the Incestuous Vietnamese Immigrants. France and "Indochina". Cultural Representations. K. Robson and J. Yee. Lanham, Lexington: 165-178.

Dorais, L.-J. (1998). "Vietnamese Communities in Canada, France, and Denmark." Journal of Refugee Studies 11(2): 107-125.

Dorais, L.-J. (2001). "Defining the Overseas Vietnamese." Diaspora 10(1): 3-27.

Dorais L. J., Le, L.P., Huy, N (1987). Exile in a Cold Land: A Vietnamese Community in Canada. New Haven, Yale Southeast Asia Studies.

Douglas, M. (1971). Deciphering a Meal Myth, Symbol and Culture. C. Geertz. New York Norton 61-82.

Douglas, M. (2003). Mary Douglas: Collected Works . Volume II. Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. London and New York, Routledge.

Drummond, L. and W. Thomas (2003). Consuming Urban Culture in Contemporary Vietnam. London, Routledge Curzon.

Dung, D. T. (1993). "Going Home." Viet Nam Forum 14: 253-261.

Duong, L. (2003). "Desire and Design: Technological Display in the Vietnamese American Café and Karaoke Bar." Amerasia Journal 29(1): 97-115.

Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network website. Retrieved 01/06/09 from http://www.dvanonline.org/.

Ebert, R. (1994). "The Scent of Green Papaya." Retrieved 31/1/11, from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19940311/REVIEWS/403110304/1023.

Ebert, R. (1999). "Three Seasons." Retrieved 14/2/11, from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19990528/REVIEWS/905280302/1023.

Ebert, R. (2000). "Catfish in Black Bean Sauce." Retrieved 24/6/09, from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20000728/REVIEWS/7280301/1023.

Ebert, R. (2001). "The Vertical Ray of the Sun." Retrieved 01/ 04/09 from http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20010914/REVIEWS/109140305/1023.

Egan, S. (1999). Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press.

Edwards, R. (2005). "Journey from the Fall." Retrieved 21/2/11, from http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117928600?refcatid=31.

Feedbag, T., A, et al. (2009). "Marco Pierre White Speaks From the Throne of Apicius." Retrieved 11/05/09 from http://www.the-feedbag.com/appreciations/marco-pierre-white-speaks-from-the-throne-of-apicius.

Ferry, J. F. (2003). Food in Films: A Culinary Performance of Communication. London, Routledge.

Film and F. Server (1999). "Tony Bui." Retrieved 10/07/07 from http://www.filmfestivals.com/berlin99/html/us/interv1.htm.

Fischer, P. (1999). "Keitel, Harvey: Three Seasons ". Retrieved 19/10/08 from www.urbancinefile.com.au.

Forbes, D. (1999). Representation of the Pacific Asian Metropolis. Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific. Contested Territories. P. Dicken, P. K. Kelly, L. Kong, C. Olds and W. Yeung. London Routledge.

Freeman, J. M. (1989). Hearts of Sorrow. Vietnamese-American Lives. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press.

Freeman, J. M. (1995). Changing Identities. Vietnamese Americans 1975-1995. London, Allyn and Bacon.

Freise, M. (2007). After the Expulsion of the Author: Bakhtin as an Answer to Poststructuralism. Face to Face. Bakhtin in Russia and the West. C. Adlam, R. Falconer, V. Makhlin and A. Renfrew. Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press.

Fulvi, G. (2004). "Buffalo Boy." Retrieved 20/10/04, from http://e.bell.ca/filmfest/2004/filmsschedules/description.asp?pageID=discovery

Gillespie, M. (1995). Introduction. Television, Ethnicity and Cutural Change. London, Routledge: 1-28.

Gillespie, M. (1995). Cool Bodies: TV and Talk. Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change. M. Gillespie. London, Routledge: 175-204.

Greeley , A. (2002). "Pho: the Vietnamese Addiction." Gastronomica. The Journal of Food and Culture. 2 (Winter): 80-82.

Grinberg , L. and R. Grinberg (1989). Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile. New Haven, Yale University Press.

Guneratne, A. R. and W. Dissanayake (2003). Rethinking Third Cinema. London, Routledge.

Hall, C. (2000). Culture of Empire. A Reader. Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Manchester, Manchester University Press

Hall, S. (1993). "Culture, Community, Nation." Cultural Studies 7(3): 349-363.

Harris, M. (1993). The evolution of Human Gender Hierarchies: a Trial Formulation. Sex and Gender Hierarchies. B. D. Miller. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Hashimoto, A. and C. Ikels (2005). Filial Piety in Changing Asian Societies The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing. M. Lewis Johnson, M. L. Bengtson, P. G. Coleman and T. B. L. Kirkwood. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 437-442.

Hayward, S. (2000). Cinema Studies : The Key Concepts. London, Routledge.

Henchy , J. (2005). Vietnamese New Women and the Fashioning of Modernity. France and "Indochina". Cultural Representations. K. Robson and J. Yee. Lanham.: 121-138.

Henderson, E. (2004). "Cyclo." Retrieved 21/02/11, from http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/cyclo/914.

Herman, D. (2009). Basic Elements of Narrative. Chichester, Blackwell.

Hesser, A., Ed. (2008). Eat, Memory: Great Writers at the Table. A collection of essays from the New York Times. London, Norton & Company Ltd.

Hoai, P. T. (1998). "Sunday Menu." Meanjin 57(3): 453-462.

Hong, L. (2008). "Miss Universe Vietnam Crowned ". Retrieved 25/09/08 from http://www.thanhniennews.com/entertaiments/?catid=6&newsid=38953.

Hornaday, A. (2006). "First Morning." Retrieved 20/02/11, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/movies/first-morning,1113778/critic-review.html#reviewNum1.

Huss, R. (1986). The Mindscapes of Art: Dimension of the Psyche in Fiction, Drama, and Film. London Associated University Presses.

Jackson, E. (1996). Food and Transformation. Imagery and Symbolism of Eating. Toronto, Inner City Books.

Jameson, F. (1981). The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Jameson, F. (1991). Nostalgia for the Present: Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham, Duke University Press: 279-296.

Jamieson, N. L. (1993). Understanding Vietnamese Culture. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Jones, J. (2007). "Food Can Be Artistic -But It Can Never Be Art." Guardian Retrieved 12 June 2007, from http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/art/2007/05/food_can_be_artistic_but_it_ca.html.

Jones, M. (2007). Feast: Why Humans Share Food. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Keller, J. R. (2006). Food, Film and Culture. A Genre Study. Jefferson, McFarland & Company.

Kham, N. K. (1967). An Introduction to Vietnamese Culture. Tokyo, Tokyo Press Co Ltd.

Khoi, L. T. (1993). "A Heart of Sorrow? Exposing the Lighter Side of the Vietnamese American Experience." Viet Nam Forum 14(1): 321-337.

Kibria, N. (1993). Family Tightrope: the Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

Kiem, T. V. (1961). The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States, Republic of Vietnam.

Korsmeyer, C. (1999). Making Sense of Taste. Food and Philosophy. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Krowolski, N. and N. Tung (1997). "Some notes on Vietnamese Alimentary Practices and Foreign Influences." Vietnamese Studies. Eating and drinking habits and cultural identity 3: 151-190.

Lam, A. (1993). "My Vietnam, My America." Viet Nam Forum 14: 268-272.

Lam, A. (2005). Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora. Berkeley, Heyday Books.

Lam, A. (2005). Notes of a Warrior's Son Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora A. Lam. Berkeley, Heyday Books: 23-50.

Lam, A. (2007). My Journey Home Part 1 from http://www.youtube.com/user/Lamqdung.

Lam, A. (2009). Vietnamese Diaspora and California Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art. M. Heberle. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Lam, L. (2006). 20 Nuits et Un Jour de Pluie. Paris, Sandrine Lamantowicz.

Lamb, D. (1997). Viet Kieu: a Bridge Between Two Worlds. Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles.

Lang, R. (1989). American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minelli. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Larsen, P. (2007). "A Vietnamese-American film tells the story of the boat people who settled in O.C.." Retrieved 12/10/08 from http://vietnamesefilmblog.wordpress.com/category/director-ham-tran

Le, N. (2008). The Boat. Edinburgh, Canongate

Le, Y. (2004). "'Spirits' wonder into town ". Retrieved 01/10 2009 from http://nguoi-viet.com/absolutenm/anmviewer.asp?a=3936&z=52.

Lewis, R. (2004). Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem. London, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

Liamputtong, P. and H. Nguyen (2007). Private Matter, Public Concern: Lived Experiences of Abortion among Young Women in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam Reproduction, Childbearing and Motherhood. A Cross-Cultural Perspective. P. Liamputtong. New York Nova Science Publisher 79-96.

Lieu, N. L. (2004). Remembering "the Nation" Through Pageantry. Femininity and the Politics of Vietnamese Womanhood in the Hoa Hau Ao Dai Contest. Asian American Women L. Trinh Vo, M. Sciachitano, S. H. Armitage, P. Hart and K. Weathermon, The Frontiers Publishing 312-336.

Long, L. D. (2004). Viet Kieu on a Fast Track Back? Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind. L. D. Long and E. Oxfeld. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 65-89.

Lowe, L. (2003). Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Making Asian-American Differences. Theorizing Diaspora. J. Evans Braziel and A. Mannur. London, Blackwell Publishing.

Lury, C. (1998). Prosthetic Culture. Photography, Memory and Identity. London Routledge.

Lynn, H. (1997). Fast food / Spoiled Identity. Iranian Migrants in the British Catering Trade. Food, Health and Identity. P. Caplan. London, Routledge 87-110.

Macnab, G. (2000). "Three Seasons ". Retrieved 18/10/08 from www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/557.

Marchetti, G. (1993). Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction. London, University of California Press.

Marchetti, G. (1993). Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction. London, University of California Press.

Marks, L. U. (2000). The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses. London, Duke University Press.

Marr, D. G. (1980). Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925. London, University of California Press.

Maslin, J. (1993). "The Scent of Green Papaya (1993). Review/Film; Vision of a Vietnam as Yet Unscarred.". Retrieved 21/1/11 from http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9F0CE1D9113EF932A25753C1A965958260.

McLeod, M. and T. Nguyen (2001). Culture and Customs of Vietnam. Westport, Greenwood Press.

Minhky and G.-T. Pham (1999). Cuisine Vietnamienne. Aix-en-Provence, Edisud.

Mintz, S. and M. Du Bois (2002). "The Anthropology of Food and Eating." Annual Review of Anthropology 31: 99-119.

Mishra, S. (2006). Diaspora Criticism. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Mulvey, L. (1975). "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16(3): 6-18.

Naficy, H. (1993). The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Naficy, H., Ed. (1998). Home, Exile, Homeland. Film, Media, and the Politics of Place. London, Routledge.

Naficy, H. (2001). An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Fimmaking. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

Naremore, J. (1998). Acting Cinema. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Narkunas, J. P. (2001). Streetwalking in the Cinema of City: Capital Flows Through Saigon. Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context M. Shiel and T. Fizmaurice. Oxford Blackwell: 147-157.

Ngo, T. N. B. (2004). The Confucian Four Feminine Virtues (tu duc): The Old Versus the New-Ke Thua Versus Phat Huy. Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam. L. Drummond and H. Rydstrom. Singapore, National University of Singapore.

Ngoc, H. (1998). Sketches For a Portrait of Vietnamese Culture. (Third Enlarged Edition). Hanoi, The Gioi Publishers.

Nguyen, A., B. Cost, et al. (2006). Into the Vietnamese Kitchen: Treasured Foodways, Modern Flavors. Berkley, Ten Speed Press.

Nguyen, C. (1985). Vietnamese Experiences as Migrants and Refugees. Richmond, Clearing House on Migration Issues: 1-12.

Nguyen, C. (1993). "Power from the Heart: A Trip to Viet Nam." Viet Nam Forum 14: 262-267.

Nguyen, C. (2007). Ham Tran, Director of "Journey from the Fall". Retrieved 05/04/09 from http://vietnamesefilmblog.wordpress.com.

Nguyen, M. T. (2006). "An Interview with 'Journey from the Fall' Director Ham Tran." Retrieved 05/04/2009 from www.enderminh.com/blog/archive/2006/01/13/1161.aspx.

Nguyen, P., L. Nguyen, et al. (2007). Secrets of the Red Lantern. London, Murdoch Books.

Nguyen, T. (2006). "A Bit of a Spirit Favor is Equal to a Load of Mundane Gifts": Votive Paper Offrings of Len Dong Rituals in Post-Renovation Vietnam Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities. K. Fjelstad and T. Nguyen. Ithaca, Cornell Southeast Asia Program: 127-142.

Nguyen, T. H. and B. King (2004). The Culture of Tourism in the Diaspora. The Case of the Vietnamese Community in Australia. Tourism, Diaspora and Space. T. E. Coles and J. T. Dallen. Abingdon, Routledge: 172-187.

Nguyen, V. (2003). The Mid-Autumn Festival (TET TRUNG TU). Vietnam. Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit. V. Nguyen and L. Kendall. London, University of California Press.

Nha -Trang, C.-H. T.-N. (1992). "Women in Vietnamese Folklore." Retrieved from http://www.vietnamlit.org/nhatrang/women.html.

Niranjana, T. (1992). Siting Translations. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Norindr, P. (1996). Phantasmatic Indochina. London Duke University Press.

Orr, J. (1998). Contemporary Cinema. Edinburgh Edinburgh University Press Ltd.

Pears, P. A. (2004). Remnants of Empire in Algeria and Vietnam. Women, Words, and War. Lanham, Lexington Books.

Peters, E. J. (2001). Culinary Crossing and Distruptive Identites: Contesting Colonial Categories in Everyday Life. Of Vietnam: Identities in Dialogue. J. Bradley Winston and L. Chau-Pech Ollier. Houndmill, Palgrave: 21-32.

Pham, A. X. (2000). Catfish and Mandala: A Vietnamese Odyssey. London, Flamingo.

Pham, X. D., H. N. Do, et al. (1995). Vietnam: a Tobacco Epidemic in the Making. San Francisco University of California

Phelan, J. and P. J. Rabinowitz (2005). A Companion to Narrative Theory. London, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Phillips, R. (2000). "An Interview with Viet Linh, Director of Collective Flat." World Socialist Web. Retrieved 27/10/2004, from http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/apr2000/sff2-a21.shtml.

Phipps, L. (2001). "Interview: Ray of Light; Viet Nam's Tran Anh Hung Cyclos His Way to "Vertical" ". Retrieved 04/10/08, from www.indiewire.com.

Polon, L. and C. A (1983). The Whole Earth Holiday Book. United States of America Scott, Foresman and Company.

Probyn, E. (2000). Carnal Appetites. Food and Sex Identitites. London, Routledge.

Quinn-Judge, S. (2005). "Who are the Vietnamese in 2005?" Retrieved 02/02/06 from http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/article_2467.jsp

Richie, D. (1977). Ozu. London, University of California Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). Time and Narrative. Volume 1. Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1985). Time and Narrative. Volume 2. Chicago, University of Chicago.

Ritzer, G. (1993). The McDonaldization of Society. Thousand Oaks, Pine Forge Press.

Roberge, M. (2005). Who are Generation 1.5 Students? Northern New England Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference. Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH.

Roddick, N. (1999). "Tony Bui: Three Seasons ". Retrieved 21/04/08 from www.urbancinefile.com.au.

Romney, J. (2001). "At the Height of Summer: In the Realm of Sensuous." Retrieved 07/02/11, from http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/at-the-height-of-summer-pg-667147.html.

Rooney, D. (2001). "Green Dragon." Retrieved 20/02/11, from http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117797139?refcatid=31.

Rose, C. (1999). "A Conversation with Filmmaker Tony Bui." Retrieved 01/07/09, from http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/4317.

Rosenbaum, J. (1994). "The Scent of Green Papaya." Retrieved 10/07/08 from http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-scent-of-green-papaya/Film?oid=1065551.

Ruscio, A. (1989). Viet Nam: la Terre, l'Histoire, les Hommes. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Russell, J. (2002). "Jim Russell Interviews Timothy Linh Bui." Retrieved 12/9/07 from www.asiaxpress.com.

Rutledge, P. (1985). The Role Of Religion In Ethnic Self –Identity: A Vietnamese Community. London, University Press of America, Inc.

Safran, W. (1991). "Diasporas in Modern Society: Myths of Homeland and Return." Diaspora 1: 83-99.

Said, E. W. (2003). Orientalism. London, Penguin.

Samuels, A. (1986). Jung and the Post-Jungians. London, Routledge.

Schatz, T. (1999). The Vietnam War Film: America's Post-Traumatic Disorder Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second. Austin, University of Texas Press: 401.

Seitz, M. (2007). "Surviving in the Aftermath of Vietnam. " Retrieved 21/2/11, from http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/22/movies/23jour.html?_r=1&bl&ex=1174795200&en=cfa6961cfc348721&ei=5087%0A.

Selig, M. (1994). "History and Subjectivity, Part I: What We Won't Learn from the Hollywood-Style Vietnam War Film." Nobody Gets Off the Bus: The Viet Nam Generation Big Book 4(March). Retrieved 23/9/07 from http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Texts/Scholarly/Selig_Hollywood_01.html

Smillie, S. (2007) "Is Food Art?" Retrieved 03/10/08 from http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2007/may/24/theatreoffood

Stam, R. (1989). Subversive Pleasure: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film. Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

Stam, R. (2000). The Cult of the Auteur. Film Theory: An Introduction. R. Stam. Oxford, Blackwell: 83-88.

Stam, R., R. Burgoyne, et al. (1992). New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Beyond. London, Routledge.

Stam, R. and T. Miller (2000). Film and Theory: An Anthology. Oxford, Blackwell.

Steward, F., K. Bowen, et al., Eds. (2002). Two Rivers. New Vietnamese Writing From America and Viet Nam. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press.

Stratton, J. (2000). The Desirable Body. Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption. Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

Stromgren, D. (1990). Now to the Banquet We Press: Hitchcock's Gourmet and Gourmand Offerings. Beyond the Stars III: The Material World in American Popular Film. P. Loukides and L. K. Fuller. Bowling Green, Bowling Green University Press.

Sturken, M. (1997). Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Sutton, D. (2001). Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory. Oxford, Berg.

Synnott, A. (1991). Sense from Plato to Marx. Varieties of Sensory Experience. D. Howes. Toronto University of Toronto Press: 61-76.

Tai, H. T. H. (2001). Faces of Remembrance and Forgetting The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in late Socialist Vietnam. H. T. H. Tai. London University of California Press: 167-189.

Tarr, C. (2005). Tran Anh Hung as Diasporic Filmmaker France and "Indochina": Cultural representations. K. Robson and J. Yee. Lanham, Lexington Books: 153-164.

Teh, H. G. (2004). "Cyclo." Retrieved 01/09/05 from http://www.dvdtown.com/review/cyclo/11978/2008/.

Telfer, E. (1996). Food for Thought. London, Routledge.

Terada, A. M. and J. Larsen (1989). The Story of Le Nuong. Under the Starfruit Tree. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press: 99-101.

Thao, H. (2002). Evolution of Remittances from Family to Faith Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks. H. R. Fuchs Ebaugh and J. Saltzman Chafetz. Oxford, Rowman Altamira.

Thomas, M. (1999). "Dislocation of Desire: The Transnational Movement of Gifts from the Vietnamese Diaspora." Anthropological Forum 9(2): 145-161.

Thomas, M. (2004). "Transition in Taste in Vietnam and the Diaspora." The Australian Journal of Anthropology 15(1): 54-67.

Tibere, L. (1997). "Promoting Vietnamese Gastronomic Heritage on the Touristic Market: Contribution to a sociological approach to the discovery of alimentary alterity." Vietnamese Studies: Eating and Drinking Habits and Cultural Identity. 4: 97-125.

Tölölyan, K. (1991). "Nation State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface." Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Affairs 1(1): 4-5.

Tölölyan, K. (1996). "Rethiking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." Diaspora 5: 3-36.

Tonthat, L. (1993). "You still remember?" Viet Nam Forum 14(1): 315-318.

Tooze, G. W. (2003). "Anh Hung Tran." Retrieved 01/09/05 from http://207.136.67.23/tran.htm.

Tran, D., A. Lam, et al., Eds. (1995). Once Upon a Dream. The Vietnamese-American Experience. Kansas City, Universal Press Syndicate Company.

Trinh , T. M.-h. (1992). Framer Framed. London, Routledge.

Trinh , T. M.-h. (1992). "From a Hybrid Place: Interview with Judith Mayne" Framer Framed. T. M.-h. Trinh London, Routledge: 137-148.

Trinh, T. M.-h. (1999). Cinema Interval. London, Routledge.

Truong, M. (2004). The Book of Salt. London, Vintage.

Tuan, P. (2008). Soldier Images in Vietnamese Movies Vietnamese Cinematography: A Research Journey L. T. Do et al, The Gioi Publisher: 162-167.

Tung, N. (1997). "Are There Regional Differences in Vietnamese Cookery?" Vietnamese Studies: Eating and Drinking Habits and Cultural Identity. 3: 107-149.

Vaalastaff (2008). "Ham Tran." Retrieved 05/10/09 from http://www.vietfilmfest.com/2009/author/vaalastaff/ham-tran/

Van, D. N. (1993). "The Flood Myth and the Origin of Ethnic Groups in Southeast Asia." Journal of American Folklore 106(421): 304-337.

Van Hear, N. (1998). New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities. London, UCL Press Limited.

Veenker, R. (1999-2000). "Forbidden fruit: Ancient Near Eastern sexual metaphors." Hebrew Union College Annual 70-71: 57-73.

Vien, N. K. (1996). "The America I Know. Nuoc My ma toi biet." Viet Nam Forum 15: 194-196.

VietKa (2009). "VietKA: Archives of Vietnamese Boat People." Retrieved 21/08/09 from http://www.vietka.com

Vigil, J. D et al. (2004). A Shortcut to the American Dream? Vietnamese Youth Gangs in Little Saigon Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity. J. Lee and M. Zhou. Abingdon, Routledge: 207-220.

Vo, L. T. (2003). "Vietnamese Americans: Diaspora & Dimensions." Amerasia Journal 29(1).

Vu, T. (1999). The Dragon Hunt: Five Stories. New York, Hyperion.

Vu, V. (2005). "Director's Notes". Retrieved 11/10/05 from www.firstmorningthemovie.com/story.html.

Vuong, T. Q. and N. Nha (1997). "Gastronomic Heritage of Vietnam." Vietnamese Studies: Eating and drinking habits and cultural identity. 3: 25-40.

Walker, A., Ed. (2001). Food and the Memory. Totnes, Prospect Books.

Welch Drummond, L. and H. Rydstrom (2004). Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam. Singapore, Singapore University Press.

White, B. (2007). "This 'Journey' Doesn't Know Where it's Going." Retrieved 21/2/11, from http://www.seattlepi.com/movies/312343_journey20q.html.

Wood, J. (2001). "A Quick Chat with Tran Anh Hung." Retrieved 04/10/01 from www.kamera.co.uk.

Woods, T. (1999). Beginning Postmodernism. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Yabroff, J. (1999). "Harvey Keitel and the Sundance Kid." Retrieved 18/10/08 from www.salon.com/ent/movie/int/1999/18int.html.

Yarborough, T. (2005). Surviving Twice: Amerasian Children of the Vietnam War. Dulles, Potomac Books